THEORETICAL AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

JULY 1959

Marxism Today

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Monthly 1/6

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Marxism Today

Vol. 3 **No. 7**

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Central Books Ltd.,
37 Grays Inn Road,
London, W.C.1.

Subscription rates
Six issues 10s. 6d.
Twelve issues 21s.

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What after independence?

Jack Woddis

I

BEFORE the Second World War the majority of people in the world were ruled over by the representatives of the Western imperialist powers or by governments subservient to them. Today, the majority of the people, irrespective of the social or political system under which they live, have their own national governments, and the relatively small area of the world where imperialist political power still rules is shrinking daily. This is a measure of the great change brought about in the world through the growth of the movement for national independence.

Although there are factors common to all these nations winning independence, there is such an immense variation in their history, traditions, class structure, class relations and stage reached that one must be exceptionally careful not to throw a single all-embracing blanket over the lot.

There is, in fact, no pure prototype, nor a pure transition from one stage to another. Class relations are never static and the pattern of advance is in constant change.

It is in the midst of these very complex, changing and varying phenomena that one has to trace certain common features and certain guiding principles which have a general validity for all these countries. The remarks which follow are in respect of those countries which have won *political* independence, but where the working class is not yet the established leadership of the national movement, and where the task of *economic* liberation from imperialism remains to be carried out.

II

What is the character of the movement expressed in this immense, world-wide upheaval of peoples to win their independence? How would one define the nature of these revolutionary changes? What class forces comprise this movement, and what is their inter-relationship? What class forces stand in the way of the fight to win, maintain and strengthen independence?

These questions must be clearly answered before one can go on to consider what are the perspectives opening up for countries which have gained their political independence, and what tasks confront the working class and its Party in this second, important stage of the struggle.

The character of these movements is clearly indicated by the policies pursued by the classes and parties embraced by them, by the slogans they launch and the demands they make.

The national movement faces two ways—outwards and inwards. As a *national* movement it faces outwards against the external enemy, *imperialism*, because it is imperialist rule which is hindering national development. But imperialism has traditionally allied itself with a class force inside the oppressed nation—feudalism, which is mainly expressed in the feudal ownership of the land. Thus the national movement faces inwards, too, against imperialism's main ally, *feudalism*.

Imperialism has a secondary ally in those sections of the local capitalist class which are mainly connected either with feudal landownership and moneylending, or with imperialist trading or with both. Such capitalist sections see their destiny as linked with the existing system, and therefore they, too, must be dealt with as if in the imperialist camp.

Thus the struggle is anti-imperialist, and anti-feudal; for national independence, and for democracy, the antithesis of feudalism. The struggle for national independence and sovereignty is not just a struggle for a slogan but a concrete struggle to establish a national state, with its own constitution and parliamentary forms, its own national flag and national anthem, its own national armed forces, its own national language and culture, and, above all, its own national industry and developed agriculture.

The class forces which comprise the national movement arise from the very nature of imperialist exploitation. Imperialism uses colonial countries as agrarian appendages of imperialist industry, as sources of cheap raw materials (minerals and agricultural materials) for the metropolis, as controlled markets for imperialist manufactured goods, and as profitable spheres of investment.

This system demands the ruin of the previous forms of subsistence agriculture, the virtual destruction of local handicrafts industries, and the creation of a large army of propertyless peasants who, through the ruin of their previous forms of economy and subsistence, are compelled to take up wage labour in imperialist enterprises (mines, plantations, docks, transport, building, etc.). The industrial development of the oppressed nation is held back, monopoly control established over

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imports and exports, and the peasantry not allowed to flourish.

For the mass of workers and peasants this means the most appalling conditions of life—low standards, slum housing, disease, undernourishment, illiteracy—since there are no profits to be made by imperialism in abolishing these evils.

The stunted, distorted economies which are the consequence of this policy, give rise, too, to stunted, distorted forms of social and cultural life. Only a small intelligentsia can evolve—and even for that, the imperialist economy has few openings; for technicians it is the European who is given preference. It was common to find before the war Indians who were trained engineers, with all the necessary qualifications for a technical job, compelled to take up employment in their own country as simple garage mechanics and other similar jobs.

The national capitalists (i.e., those who are not allied with imperialism), too, are affected by imperialist domination. As capitalists they are naturally concerned with profits. To make profits they need control of their own, domestic market, and they need an expansion of that market. No less, they require to build up their own industry in order to make the goods to supply to that market. But everywhere the national capitalist turns he finds the imperialist holding the controls in his hands, dominating the market, owning the raw materials of which he robs the country, and shipping in the manufactured goods with which he floods and monopolises the market. Even where the national capitalist owns raw materials he finds himself at a disadvantage, for the imperialist monopolies, which control the world market, compel him to sell at a low price but to pay highly for the manufactured goods he purchases from them.

Thus workers, peasants, intellectuals, national capitalists—all find their development stifled. To maintain this economic exploitation of a whole people, imperialism stations its troops on the native soils, sets up military bases, and clamps down its own system of arbitrary law and despotic rule which severely restricts the people's democratic strivings.

It is the very nature of imperialist oppression itself which gives rise to *national* revolt, the revolt of a whole people who have divergent class interests but who are united in their opposition to imperialism which denies them the possibilities of growth and development.

III

A key role in the national struggle is played by the national capitalists. What is this role, and how is it to be explained?

As Lenin pointed out, there is a fundamental difference between capitalists in oppressing countries and those in oppressed countries. In oppressed countries the capitalist can play an objectively progressive role because he can become part of the anti-imperialist front. Desire for profits is the economic motive which brings the national capitalist into the anti-imperialist fold, even though, in his own mind, it is his genuine patriotic feeling which may be uppermost. As a capitalist his first concern is to control and exploit his own market. But this domestic market is restricted by the poverty of the workers and peasants, and even by the relative poverty of other classes and strata. Furthermore, as we have seen, this very limited market is dominated by imperialist monopolies, which not only flood the market with their own goods, but actually own or control a lion's share of the actual trading services, not to mention the allied transport, shipping, banking, insurance and so on.

Therefore the national capitalists have a very real conflict with imperialism.

But the national capitalists, to make profits, do not have to fight only the imperialist monopolies. As capitalists, if they are to make profits, they must exploit their own workers. If the workers obtain too much power and are able to exert sufficient pressure to obtain substantial economic and social concessions (e.g. higher wages, shorter hours, pensions, better social services) then the sphere of exploitation by the national capitalists will be restricted. Hence the national capitalists strive to keep their own working class in check, limit their democratic rights and organisation, and deluge them under a barrage of purely nationalist ideology so as to persuade them to identify their cause completely with that of their own capitalists, and thus abandon their class outlook and specific class demands.

This, in itself, is a contradiction for the national capitalists, since they are too weak to fight the imperialists on their own and have to rally the people, especially the workers and peasants. The very act of rallying the people, of stirring them up, increasingly raises the whole question of the democratic mobilisation of the people, the logical outcome of which, more power for the people, the national capitalists fear.

Thus the national capitalists, like Janus, face two ways—*with* their own working class against the imperialists; but *against* their working class if they find their own capitalist class interests are affected or in danger. So the national capitalist class vacillates and is not wholeheartedly anti-imperialist (it even has some economic links with imperialism and feudalism; and politically, is alert enough to recognise that the world march to socialism endangers its own aims of profit-seeking).

Inevitably, therefore, the national capitalists have a tendency to backslide in the national struggle, to hesitate, to slow up the independent action of the workers and peasants if they feel it is getting out

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of hand and likely to pursue a course more decisive and to a further point than the national capitalists wish to go. This tendency of the national capitalists to vacillate in the face of the imperialists, is not a subjective factor but a purely political and economic one which arises from the contradictory, facing-two-ways position of the national capitalists.

The extent to which the national capitalists vacillate in practice can be seen in the twentieth-century history of China where the united front of the workers and capitalists was constantly broken, and just as constantly rebuilt until the firm alliance of workers and peasants led by the Chinese Communist Party proved strong enough to win the co-operation of the national capitalists to march along the high road of liberation to the building of socialism.

It should be appreciated that the support of the national capitalists for the anti-imperialist alliance does not prevent their later desertion towards the side of imperialism; but neither does this latter inclination preclude their later return to the anti-imperialist fold. History is replete with examples of such vacillations. It is the special task of the working class to *struggle to maintain the alliance* in the face of these weaknesses, hesitations, manoeuvres, fears (both of imperialism and of their own workers), and even downright treachery of the national capitalists.

This vacillating, two-way-facing attitude of the national capitalists has been a natural phenomenon of the national struggle ever since it began. In the twentieth century, however, the national struggle takes place under new conditions, and this cannot but have an important influence on sections of the national capitalists, as shown in the statements made and policies pursued by some of their most enlightened spokesmen. The significance of the birth of the Soviet Union, so decisive for the advance of the formerly oppressed peoples, was fully understood by that patriotic leader of the Chinese national capitalists, Sun Yat-sen, who, in his last declarations called for unity between China and the Soviet Union, as well as for an internal united front with the Chinese Communists. In our own day other leading spokesmen of the national capitalists—Nehru, Kassem, Nkrumah—have shown, each in his own way, and in varying degrees, a considerable understanding of the world in which they live and their need to pursue policies which, to a certain extent, face up to this changing world.

In this respect, perhaps it is President Sukarno of Indonesia who has given clearest voice to the appreciation by the national capitalists of the forces moving the world today.

Addressing a meeting of university students in Indonesia on April 3rd, 1958, President Sukarno said: "I am not a Communist, but we must see clearly the current of our times." The President went on to say that after the First World War the Soviet Union emerged, and since the Second World War thirteen more socialist countries had emerged and the movement for national independence in Asia had arisen. It should be said, he added, that the twentieth century was an era when many nations gained independence, the era of the establishment of the socialist countries, the era of the sputnik and atomic energy. *Whoever could not see clearly this current, emphasised Sukarno, would be crushed.*

IV

It is against this general background that we now need to consider what tasks confront the working class and its Party on the morrow of winning political independence.

We have seen that the national capitalists, with all their weaknesses, are drawn into the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal struggle by their own class interests; and that it is these same class interests which compel the national capitalists to strive to retain their domination of the national movement in order to hold their own masses under control and so realise the profits in their home market for which they are basically fighting.

The working class supports the alliance with the capitalists, since, despite their different fundamental class interests, they both have a common interest in defeating imperialism and destroying feudalism. In the course of this struggle for national independence and democracy the working class strives, step by step, to win over the leadership of the national struggle in order to prevent any temporising or compromising by the national capitalists, and in order also to hasten and safeguard independence, defend the class interests of the workers, push forward the struggle for independence to its conclusion, complete economic, political and military liberation, and so open up the path of advance to socialism.

Therefore the working class, whilst allying with the national capitalists, is also in contest with it for the leadership of the movement. It should be clearly understood that class alliance is not class collaboration. *Class alliance, in fact, is a very highly developed, complex and testing form of the class struggle itself.* In class collaboration the working class submits to the domination of the capitalists, accepts capitalist leadership and follows capitalist outlook and policy in despite of its own class interests. The capitalists work for and welcome this relationship with the working class.

In taking part in a class alliance, however, the working class and its Party insists on playing an independent role, putting forward its own policy on *all* questions affecting the national struggle and the workers' own interests, fighting to win support for this policy, *defending its own class interests in a*

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way which does not upset the alliance, while striving to establish its own leadership in the alliance. The national capitalists do not want this form of relationship with the working class, they try to avoid it, and take special measures whenever they feel that their undisputed leadership is endangered.

Thus, for example, Nkrumah did not hesitate to purge militant leaders from the Convention People's Party; nor has Nasser hesitated in suppressing and throwing into prison those patriots who wish to ensure that the benefits of the national struggle in the U.A.R. are not reserved solely for the national capitalists.

> "There is no doubt," said Khrushchov, "that the majority of Arabs have common interests in the struggle against colonial slavery. But after a country has rid itself of foreign domination, the interests of the people cannot be ignored. Indeed, the interests of all Arabs cannot coincide. Therefore the attempts made under cover of nationalism to ignore the interests of particular sections of the population, the interests of the working people, are untenable."
>
> (Speech at a reception for an Iraqi Government delegation, Moscow, March 16th, 1959.)

These remarks of Khrushchov's hold good for all countries winning political independence. In all of them one finds the national capitalists, or sections of them, trying to use the cloak of nationalism to divert the workers from their own class interests or, if that fails, suppressing their trade union and political rights in the name of nationalism. Thus in Malaya, Burma, most Arab countries, and in Africa, the workers' own party, the Communist Party, is denied legal existence. In others, such as Sudan, for example, the trade unions, too, are suppressed. Another method used by the national capitalists to subordinate the working class to their domination is the setting up of separate trade unions controlled by the party of the national capitalists; this is the case in India, with the Indian National Trade Union Congress led by the Congress Party, and similar attempts have been made in Ceylon, Burma, Indonesia and Egypt. The new Industrial Relations Act in Ghana also represents a move on the part of the national capitalists, notwithstanding the "socialist" language with which its presentation has been accompanied, to limit the rights of the trade unions and to bring them under the undisputed domination of the government and of the party led by the national capitalists, the Convention People's Party.

It is therefore clear that to establish an alliance with the national capitalists is no easy task for the working class. The national capitalists welcome the support of the workers; they are prepared to let the workers fight and die for the national cause as long as the latter do not strengthen their own class identity and outlook but are willing to follow tamely in the wake of the national capitalists, and accept their leadership in all things.

The alliance and struggle between the working class and the national capitalists, this complex unity of opposites, is a root question of the struggle for political independence and, even more so, in the phase following on the attainment of that goal.

The working class and its Party does not establish its leadership of the national movement by proclaiming itself the leadership or by simply demanding it. The question as to whether the working class or the national capitalists will lead the nation is a very definite though complicated form of struggle. It is only in the course of this struggle itself, in the course of the battle to win, defend and strengthen national independence that the two contesting, though allied, classes and their parties are tested.

And this testing takes place around a whole series of specific questions.

These include first a number of political questions —the new state structure and its composition, the form of government and parliament, democratic and trade union rights, the withdrawal of foreign troops, national defence and security, and foreign policy.

Secondly, there are many social questions— national language and national culture, better working and living conditions (higher wages, shorter hours, pensions and social security, health services, housing), and education.

Thirdly, there are a number of economic questions —the agrarian revolution, industrialisation, nationalisation of foreign monopolies and property, the workers' attitude to production and strikes, and questions of foreign trade and foreign economic aid.

This whole series of problems, it should be remembered, although the subject of the testing ground on which the working class and the national capitalists are competing, takes place under conditions in which the main task is to complete the national liberation. *This means that at this stage, too, as in the pre-independence phase of the struggle, the main enemy is imperialism. The major conflict is between the nation and the imperialists. The minor contradiction between the workers and the national capitalists is one that has to be solved within the framework of the continuing alliance of these two classes, and in conditions in which imperialism and its agents strive to break up the alliance by aggravating differences between the workers and the national capitalists, using "left", sectarian elements and slogans on the one hand, and beating the big drum of "the Communist danger" on the other.*

This clearly demands a high quality of political leadership and experience, a mature understanding and an ability to use the utmost flexibility without

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forsaking principles. This underlines the essential need for Communist Parties in such countries.

V

In the economic sphere there are two basic questions which must be solved after the winning of political independence. First, the building of a national industry; secondly, the ending of feudal landownership and the building of a rich agriculture.

It is often not realised in the West, and even in the British Labour movement, the extent to which the newly independent countries are still economically dominated by the former imperialist rulers. As a result of this foreign domination, even after ten and more years of independence, the pattern of the economy in these countries is still basically colonial, little industrial development has taken place, feudal relations still exist on the land, and the growing of crops for export or the extraction of minerals remain the principal element in the national economy. The result of this is the continuing poverty of the workers and peasants, the hampering of the democratic revolution, and the limited growth of the national capitalists.

Imperialist economic interests are safeguarded not only by their direct economic grip, their monopoly ownership of key sectors of the economy, but also by their continuing political influence in the form of "advisers" and "experts" to the new governments. One example will suffice to show how British imperialism utilises its political positions in Africa to safeguard its economic positions, and to delay the industrialisation of its present and former colonies.

A recent report on Africa (*Africa: A Continent in Turmoil*) issued by a West End firm of advertising agents, reveals the struggle which has been taking place between what it calls "the politicians" on the one hand and the economic advisers to the Ghana Government on the other. "All forms of industrialisation . . . remain 'the Fetish of the politicians'," complains this report. But "Dr. Nkrumah's top economic experts—nearly all of them *European* experts" are pushing the idea of a "second bulk crop" to be developed alongside cocoa, on which Ghana mainly depends. The report states confidently: "It was our impression, for what it's worth, that *finally the advisers will have their way*". In other words, these European advisers are utilising their positions of alleged assistance to Ghana to actually hold up her economic development by preventing her rapid industrialisation. Needless to add, the report referred to is directed to British manufacturers and British investors.

In Nigeria, the *West African Pilot* has pointedly asked, in reference to the domination of the new Nigerian National Shipping Line by the British-controlled Conference Lines: "Political independence will come next year, but when do we have economic independence?"

In the light of such experiences—and they could be repeated many times—it is understandable that in newly independent countries the questions of industrialisation (with its essential basis in heavy engineering, and the manufacture of machines and machine tools), of foreign aid and advice, are fundamental to economic development. Today such countries have a much more favourable situation in which to build up their economies, since they can receive the generous economic aid of the socialist countries. This aid is fundamentally different from the so-called aid of the imperialist countries. In the latter case the "aid" and "advice", whether it comes in the form of technicians, loans, investments or trade, is directed towards a continuation of the robbery which is a hall-mark of colonialism, and is accompanied by political strings as well as by manoeuvres to ensnare the country in military alliances. When an imperialist monopoly invests money or builds an enterprise in a foreign country, that enterprise belongs to the monopoly. Above all, imperialist "aid" is concerned to prevent or, at least, slow up, industrialisation in independent countries for it realises that industrialisation strengthens independence and means less profits for imperialist monopolies.

Socialist aid is quite different. It is aimed at genuine assistance, carries no political strings or military entanglements and is prepared to help in every possible way the genuine industrialisation of the developing countries. When the Soviet Union builds, as it has done in India, a steel plant, that plant belongs to the Indian people who will derive all the benefits from it. Similarly, Ceylon's first iron and steel plant, which is to be built with Soviet aid, will belong entirely to the people of Ceylon.[1]

The very fact of this type of socialist aid is even modifying imperialist aid policies towards newly developing countries, and, as Khrushchov has said, compelling them "to make certain concessions in dealing with these countries". Soviet example in India, in fact, has compelled British imperialism to abandon its traditional policy and to help build India's steel industry.

A further key question which confronts the newly independent countries is that of the nationalisation of foreign monopolies. Nationalisation is a particularly sharp issue in Latin America where giant American companies own the key resources—oil, tin, copper, sugar, bananas, and so on, together

[1] Valuable information on Soviet aid to economically developing countries is contained in a *Soviet News* booklet, *Foreign Trade of the U.S.S.R.* by V. Alkhimov and V. Mordvinov.

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with shipping, transport, electricity, banking, insurance and trade. In the past thirty years a number of these American undertakings have been nationalised, but the commanding heights of the economy are still in American hands, and the question of their being taken over by the various Latin American governments is in the centre of the programmes of the national democratic movements and a major question of current political discussion and agitation.

Imperialism, however, resists strenuously the move to nationalise its properties. This, above all, is its Achilles' heel. It even tries, as at present with Chile's ports, to denationalise enterprises which have been taken over. At the same time, it uses various forms of economic intimidation, together with psychological pressure, to persuade the national capitalist not to nationalise foreign undertakings, threatening to discontinue economic aid, and robbing the national capitalists of confidence by propaganda about the need for Western "know-how" and technicians as well as aid.

It has to be added that this pressure and propaganda is not without effect; and national capitalist leaders, for example in Ghana and Nigeria, have promised not to nationalise foreign enterprises, whilst in other countries, the parties of the national capitalists, even when the question of nationalisation is in their programmes, show a reluctance to apply such a measure.

Yet a move against such properties is essential if the liberation of the country is to be completed. It is noticeable that the imperialists, even whilst prepared to make political concessions to the national movement in cases where it is not under working class leadership, react most strongly when there is a move to nationalise their properties. Thus the move to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian oil company in Iran, the Suez Canal company in Egypt, and the big Dutch properties in Indonesia provoked the sharpest reaction by the imperialists, resulting in Iran in the *coup d'état* against the Mossadeq Government, and in Suez in military aggression by the Western powers. In recent weeks rumours that the Iraqi Government was to nationalise the foreign oil companies in Iraq were enough to provoke a near panic in the City of London.

Immediate nationalisation is not always the essential first step to take. Much depends on the sector of the economy affected, the size of the undertaking, the feeling and the relation of forces in the country, the international situation, and so on. Thus, for example, in connection with oil, the present tendency is for the countries whose oil resources are owned by foreign countries to insist on a bigger share of the revenue as a first concession. In other cases, different measures are advocated to limit the profits of the foreign monopolies, circumscribe their sphere of action, and compel them to operate in a way less harmful to the national economy. Whatever the specific step taken, the important thing is that it should weaken the economic hold of the foreign monopolies and strengthen the national sector of the economy.

In taking such measures the national movement is carrying forward the fight against imperialism into the economic sphere, tackling the imperialist oppressor in the domain of industry and trade, and not hesitating to take the most drastic measures to wrest control from his hands. The national capitalists, however, are not always prepared to take such steps. Therefore it is a particular task of the working class and its Party to insist on such measures and rally the whole nation to implement them. It is noticeable that during the crisis in Indonesia at the end of 1957, in connection with continuing Dutch control of West Irian, it was the Indonesian working class, specifically its main trade union organisation, S.O.B.S.I., which took the initiative in the taking over of the Dutch properties, a step which the Indonesian national capitalists, by themselves, appeared hesitant to take. Similarly, on the question of trading with the socialist countries, again it is the working class and its Party which must rally the nation to embark on this trading policy.

The need to build up the national economy also carries with it new problems for the working class in the sphere of production. In the previous pre-independence phase, the fight for better wages and conditions, for trade union and democratic rights, was mainly a straight fight against the imperialist monopolies and their government. The workers had absolutely no incentive to increase output since all the benefits of such increases went to the monopolies in the form of bigger profits and helped to maintain the country's colonial status. In these conditions the workers regarded strike action as a major weapon in their armoury and had recourse to it often.

After the winning of political independence, with the national governments embarking on various schemes of development of the national economy, the working class, whilst still guarding jealously its rights, including the strike weapon, and not hesitating to put forward its own class demands, finds it necessary to pursue its policy in a more flexible manner. It takes a positive attitude to increasing production in the national sphere and willingly co-operates with the national capitalists in this particular task.

It is extremely important for the working class to be clear on this issue. Although the struggle for national independence is an anti-imperialist struggle and is therefore part of the world-wide movement

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for socialism in the sense that it is directed against socialism's principal antagonist, world imperialism, yet if the national capitalists are the rulers in these newly independent countries, then such countries are still part of world capitalism. National capitalists are still *capitalists*. Notwithstanding the claims of leaders such as Nehru or Nkrumah to be building socialism, it is capitalism which they are constructing in their countries despite their five-year plans and their state capitalist sectors of the economy. The workers, therefore, whilst co-operating in economic development, since they know that it strengthens the nation and its resistance to imperialism, need to keep their eyes open and not be misled through demagogic talk about "socialism" by the national capitalists into abandoning their own class policy and demands.

It is true that the economic development of newly independent countries is a precondition for their advance, but *economic development is not yet socialism, nor can it, of itself, lead to socialism.* To achieve socialism, a further shift in class power is needed, this time from the hands of the national capitalists into those of the working class in alliance with the mass of the peasantry.

VI

The question of the peasantry is a major one for the national liberation movement. In fact, one can say that the heart of the national democratic revolution is the struggle of the millions of peasants to end their appalling poverty and social misery, to abolish feudal landlordism and win the land for themselves. Throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America the peasantry constitutes the majority of the population. Sékou Touré, a national leader of the Republic of Guinea and President of the General Union of Workers of Negro Africa, has declared that 90 per cent of all Africans are peasants. Figures published a few years ago showed 89 per cent of all those gainfully employed in Thailand to be engaged in agriculture; in Korea, 73 per cent; in Burma, 70 per cent; Indonesia and the Philippines, 69 per cent; India, 67 per cent; Ceylon, 62 per cent; and Malaya, 61 per cent.

Describing the Chinese revolution, Mao Tse-tung has written:

> "The Chinese revolution is virtually the peasants' revolution. . . . It is common knowledge to every schoolboy that 80 per cent of China's population are peasants. So the peasant problem has become the main problem of the Chinese revolution and the strength of the peasants constitutes the principal force of the Chinese revolution."
>
> (Mao Tse-tung: *New Democracy*: in *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 137-138.)

It is not only in numbers that the peasants are important for national independence. Independent countries cannot develop their agriculture and provide the country with food and raw materials if the impoverished peasantry is too poor to purchase the most elementary implements to improve its farming. Neither has industrialisation any basis in a country where a poverty-stricken peasantry, constituting the majority of the population, is unable to buy even a minimum of goods essential to enlarging the domestic market. As for the workers, they cannot win better conditions as long as there are millions of peasants forced by poverty to leave the land and to become a reserve army of labour, depressing wages. If the majority of the population lives in feudal conditions, democracy cannot thrive. Above all, if feudalism, imperialism's main ally, is to be swept aside, then the peasants, as those most directly exploited by the feudal landlords, must be mobilised and drawn into the struggle. (In a number of countries, such as Malaya, East, Central and South Africa, the Cameroons, Algeria, Jamaica, British Guiana, and certain other colonies, a major factor is the existence of large plantations and farms owned by foreign capitalists. Often these constitute a key sector of the economy such as the coffee plantations in Kenya, tobacco in Southern Rhodesia, sugar in the West Indies, bananas in Guatemala, sugar in Cuba. Peasants usually constitute the seasonal labour which works on these plantations. Thus the mobilisation of the peasantry is important also for the struggle against these economic strongpoints of the imperialist enemy.)

Strictly speaking, the agrarian revolution belongs to the bourgeois-democratic phase of the struggle. The breaking of the power of the feudal landlords and the dividing up of their estates is a task of the bourgeois revolution. Since the national revolution embraces the bourgeois-democratic revolution, the struggle for national independence involves a revolutionary change in landownership. The essence of this revolution, as Liu Shao-chi has pointed out, is "the *confiscation* of land of the landlord class for *distribution to the landless or land-poor peasants*".

The national capitalists cannot carry through such a revolution not only because they have economic links with the landlord class, but also because they themselves are anxious to become capitalist landlords and wish to be free to buy and sell land. This is not so easy if the land has been confiscated from the feudal landlords and given free to the poor peasants. Confiscation, too, is a dangerous precedent for the national capitalists, especially as it will be inevitably accompanied by a great awakening of the peasantry assisted by the workers.

Therefore in India, Egypt and other independent countries with governments composed of national capitalists, the type of land *reform* carried through is usually on the basis of the taking over of land above a moderate limit *with compensation*, and its

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sale to the peasants on the basis of long-term payments which become, in effect, a new form of rent. The poor peasant is unable to purchase land, so that for him the problem of land hunger remains. Even many of the relatively better-off (middle) peasants soon find that the purchase payments and other expenses become such a burden that they fall into debt as they did under feudalism, and the land is acquired by the new capitalist landlords or by the rich peasants whom these reforms are intended to assist.

It thus falls to the working class in the developing countries to raise the slogan of "land to the tiller", to help the peasants to organise and to help carry forward the struggle against feudal landlordism. In doing this the working class is laying the basis for a firm alliance between the working class and the peasantry. This is important not only in the struggle to win and strengthen national independence, but also in the fight of the working class to win recognition as leader of the national movement. If the working class stands out as the main champion of the peasantry, then the national capitalists are deprived of their mass support, and so pushed further out of the arena of national leadership.

It is around the question—who will win the peasants, the working class or the national capitalists?—that the passing over of the revolution from its national democratic phase to its socialist phase largely depends.

How soon countries winning their independence pass from the national democratic phase to the socialist one depends on both the international and internal relations of class forces. Internationally, with a third of the world in the socialist camp, and the majority of the world in the anti-colonial camp, there is today a favourable situation for advance.

Within each country, the decisive question for the transition is that of the leadership of the working class. In countries such as China, where the working class, as expressed in the role of the Communist Party, won the undisputed leadership of the national movement *before independence was won*, it was easier for the nation to pass with relative speed and peace, though not without intense political struggle, to the building of socialism. Because of its firm leadership and its strong alliance with the peasants, the Chinese workers were able to carry with them a decisive section of the national capitalists who are now helping to construct socialism in China.

In other countries, where the national capitalists still retain the leadership and control the government, the path forward will be more protracted and devious. But even with the national capitalists in control, the winning of political independence and the steps accompanying it pave the way for socialism. Political independence weakens world imperialism, the main enemy of world socialism. Within the countries, the national struggle leads to the mobilisation of the people, to the formation and growth of the people's organisations, and to the raising of the political consciousness of the many millions who are increasingly drawn into the struggle. The blows against feudalism are a setback to domestic reaction and strengthen the democratic possibilities for the working people. The development of industry gives the basis for improving the workers' standards, economically and culturally, and above all, creates a larger, more stable and more cohesive proletariat. The struggle for the nationalisation of foreign monopolies and the development of a state economic sector lays the basis for the socialist ownership of such nationalised undertakings. The ending of national restrictions and discrimination in the sphere of law, language, culture, education, voting, also aids the workers and provides them with further opportunities for development. The experience of generous aid from the socialist countries, which is the experience of countries winning independence, helps to break down hostility to the ideas of socialism and communism, and this, too, helps the advance to socialism.

It is clear, from all that has been said, that the problems confronting the working class after political independence has been won are so numerous, so complex and so important that only by the utmost understanding of the role of class forces and their dialectical development can the working class advance to power and the building of socialism. This underlines the indispensable role of a Marxist party in such countries.

In the capitalist world, experience has shown that no social-democratic party, despite its professions of "socialism", has ever built a socialist society. In the same way, in countries which have won their political independence, no party of the national capitalists, no matter how many "socialist" slogans it employs, will ever build socialism. For that the working class needs its own party, a party tried, tested and incorruptible, a party based on a scientific understanding of society, a party based on Marxism.

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Comprehensive Schools

M. D. Clarke

THE Education Act of 1944 gave a tremendous upsurge of hope to all those concerned in the educational welfare of the children of this country. It had been discussed in cellars and basements during the war, it had aroused enthusiasm at large public meetings—and it was the only Act affecting the social welfare of the people passed by the Coalition Government. It embodied the principle of equal educational opportunity for all children. Its object, according to the White Paper on Educational Reconstruction, was "to secure for children a happier childhood and a better start in life; to ensure a fuller measure of education and opportunity for young people and to provide means for all of developing the various talents with which they are endowed and so enriching the inheritance of the country whose citizens they are." We were to have secondary education for all according to the children's age, ability and aptitude, but succeeding Tory Governments have decried the children's ability and left unconsidered their aptitudes.

The English system of education more than that of any other country in the world is a class system; for the rich, the public schools, with their small classes—often a ratio of fourteen pupils to a teacher; for the rest a state system, niggardly and cheeseparing—with large classes, often poor buildings, and insufficient and underpaid teachers. Even the state system differentiates against the great mass of the children with its tripartite division in the secondary stage into grammar, technical and modern schools. The state grammar schools developed from the Education Act of 1902 and the necessity for a higher type of training for a few working class children to meet the needs of industry.

Three Types of Secondary Schools

The Norwood Report of 1943 envisaged three types of secondary schools to meet the three main groupings of children: the grammar schools for those who "are interested in learning for its own sake"; the technical schools for those "whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art"; and the modern schools for those who "deal more easily with concrete things than with ideas." To divide the children into their proper grouping a whole system of intelligence testing was devised; a system which not merely determined the intelligence at the time of testing but determined it for all time, for, said the theorists, intelligence is static, unalterable and can be measured once for all time. Nearly every child today is subjected to a test which determines not only his future school, but far too often his future career.

The number who pass is determined by the grammar school places available. For the whole country it is an average of 20 per cent, but it may vary from 10 per cent under one authority to 56 per cent under another. It often varies between girls and boys. It may vary from year to year. The test may be taken when the child is only ten, but preparations for it may begin as soon as the child enters the infants' school. Many infants', and the majority of junior schools, stream the children. Thus within a few weeks of entering school a child may be put in the "C" stream and thereafter have little chance of passing the "scholarship" and entering a grammar school.

The L.C.C. said of this part of the Norwood Report, that it was a "clever piece of rationalisation" and that "the three types of secondary education are the three types that have emerged as a result of an educational system based far more on social and economic factors than on the psychology of children."

The classification of the child on entering school far too often depends on the home. If he comes from a home where books are available, where mother or father has the time to answer the child's questions, then the child will have a better chance than if he comes from an overcrowded home, often sent out into the streets to make room for those returning from work. Then, too, there has grown up a whole system of coaching schemes, advertised in the glossy magazines, the longest (largest?) such courses from age five to eleven, costing nine guineas and presupposing that father or mother will spend leisure time preparing the child for its examination.

"Intelligence" Examination

The examination usually consists of papers in English and arithmetic and one called "Intelligence", "General Reasoning" or something similar. The standing of the junior school depends on the number of "scholarships" it gains. Far too often the possible winners are put in a class which receives special consideration and the more experienced teachers. It is guarded against changes of teacher, too common in a time of teacher shortage. The primary school is geared to training for success, its teaching may become mechanical and stereotyped, based on the kind of papers set by the local authority. The examination has a stultifying effect on the work of

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the primary school. The teachers cannot be blamed, for they are the slaves of the system.

In an essay set recently to children in a secondary school, the fear, frustration and failure engendered in their minds by the eleven-plus examination were very apparent. Many remembered the actual date of the test three years afterwards. These are some of their comments: "the day that decided my future", "I was shaking like a leaf", "they had drawn the line just before my name", "when a child doesn't pass her eleven plus she doesn't care where she goes", "failing the eleven plus gives you a deep sense of failure, you decide school is not worth working for, and gradually slip into careless ways, living only for the day when you can leave school."

There is now a growing feeling against the subjection of children to this test, which on one examination, on one day in the year, determines their future. Sir Graham Savage, formerly Education Officer for the L.C.C., has said, "The closer I got to these tests and the more my daily work taught me of their consequences, the less I liked and trusted them, and today, I deplore their very existence." Even the Ministry of Education in its memorandum on Educational Reconstruction said in 1943, "There is nothing to be said in favour of a system which subjects children at the age of eleven to the strain of a competitive examination on which not only their future schooling but their future careers may depend."

Many local authorities are seeking ways of modifying the examination, in which a writer in the *Observer* thought there was possibly an error of 30 per cent. The tests under some authorities are being spread over a year, the teachers' opinions are being sought, and more attention paid to them. But the fundamental mistake lies not in the nature of the test, but in the very idea that any test can or should be given at all, that the scope of a child's activities is predictable, or that a child's education should be limited by selection for a narrow type of school. The solution lies not in modifying the tests but in abolishing them completely and giving to every child the fullest opportunity for developing his talents.

The solution is a system of comprehensive schools to which every child in the area may go irrespective of any tests.

Comprehensive Schools

Comprehensive schools are based on two principles, that they shall take all the children of a given area, regardless of their standard of attainment, and that they shall be organised with a variety of course. There are now in existence, according to the Ministry list, forty-seven such schools, spread throughout the country, London, Coventry, Westmoreland, the West Riding and many of the local authorities are planning for them. Some of these schools have been in existence sufficiently long to be able to produce evidence of what they can do. All are convinced of the principle that it is impossible to predict a child's abilities, and that by any attempt at selection the majority have been condemned to failure without cause. All can quote many instances of children who entered the schools as failures with I.Q.s below 100, and who during their school careers have made remarkable progress, taking their General Certificate Examination and going on to the university. These are not in isolated cases but in such large numbers that the case is proved.

The comprehensive schools are not of one pattern, there are boys', girls' and mixed, their size varies from Castle Rushen about 400, to the schools in London, many of which are about 2,000. A common syllabus for the first three years gives the children who enter with a low attainment an opportunity to improve their work. After three years the children have some choice from a variety of courses, far more than could be offered in a school of 400-500.

One of the interesting facts that has emerged in every comprehensive school is the higher leaving age. London, which has more of this type than any other authority in the country, also has the highest number of pupils staying on after the statutory leaving age—in some schools as high as 80 per cent. It is the children, supported by their parents, who decide to stay on. Another striking feature is the steady improvement in the standard of work. It is not surprising that many local authorities who have not yet decided on a full policy of comprehensive schools are making experiments in that direction. About one-third of the 146 authorities are in one way or another breaking down the barriers between the three types of schools.

The benefit to the child who is taught in a comprehensive school will be paralleled by the gain to the country. Professor Zuckerman, Chairman of the Committee on Scientific Manpower, reported in *The Times Educational Supplement* in 1955 on the uninterrupted debate which had gone on since 1945, and which is continuing, on the lack of scientific manpower in Great Britain—the shortage of technicians and technologists, with comparable figures for the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A. He ends by saying, "What we in the West have now to consider is whether the repercussions of the Russian developments are going to necessitate some revolutionary change in our own educational system and what changes are in fact compatible with the democratic system in which we live."

Comprehensive schools can give the answer. The first three years provide for all children a broad, general, liberal education. Well equipped with science laboratories and practical workshops, the main drive in the schools is towards a higher

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standard of attainment with practical work for all. After three years there is a change of emphasis and a variety of courses open up fresh avenues, engineering (in some schools for girls as well as boys), commerce, catering, nursing, building, the needle trades, as well as the more academic studies. The broad education is continued, based on the probable future occupations but avoiding narrowly vocational work. The links with life outside school and the variety of stimulus result in greater enthusiasm among the pupils and consequently greater effort. The door is never closed to the child, he is encouraged to aim high.

The raising of the standard of work has had its effect on the size of the sixth form. The aim of many schools is that every pupil staying for five years shall take the General Certificate of Education or some similar examination, and this is showing signs of fulfilment. Not that the schools are uncritical of these examinations, which must be brought up to date to match the changing times. These numbers provide a good basis for the Sixth form. One school with an intake of 200 has had for the past six years an average of fifty-five in the Sixth of whom eighteen have gone on to the university or training colleges. Had there been no comprehensive school possibly the intake to the grammar school would have been thirty-five. Heads of comprehensive schools which have incorporated grammar schools of long standing report an increasing number of university entrants, but it is necessary to raise the overall figure of only 4½ per cent of an age group going on to the university if we are to have the advanced training the country needs.

It has been said that leadership in a comprehensive school goes to the more academically minded children. One of the determining factors in leadership is age, and with the raising of the leaving age the children who failed at eleven are more than holding their own in taking responsibility. The children gain more confidence. Their own opinions are interesting. "They [i.e. comprehensive schools] give all children an equal chance." "You can learn all the things you wanted to learn in a comprehensive school." "You do not stay short at one level." "They give people hope and so they work better."

The majority emphasise the lack of snobbery and the equality of opportunity.

Size of Comprehensive Schools

The large size of some of the comprehensive schools is often given as an argument against them. The figure of 2,000 is mainly due to the Ministry and is based on a wrong premise, that it is necessary to have a school five times the size of an average grammar school in order to have a reasonable sixth form. This took no cognisance of the numbers of the deprived 80 per cent who would qualify and stay for a sixth or seventh year if given the opportunity.

The argument that the head cannot know all the children in a large school is also not valid. We are living in a developing community and have outgrown the village school. The head can easily find ways and means of making his influence felt even though he may not know every child by name. The children are not lost in a large school and they welcome the opportunity of learning to mix with larger numbers. The key problem is not the size of the school but the size of the class. Even so, schools of 2,000 are not inherent in the principle of comprehensive education. It is possible to have all the benefits with far fewer numbers.

There is one warning that must be given. It is not sufficient to call a school comprehensive and to take in all the children in an area if the old divisions are made within the school. All vestige of the tripartite system must be rooted out and the school geared to the fullest development of every pupil. We must develop a new approach and new techniques if we envisage teaching all children and not the selected few. Our outworn attitudes must be discarded and there must be more research on methods of teaching.

With the establishment of comprehensive schools and the abolition of the eleven plus the primary schools must do away with streaming and cater for their rightful task—a minimum standard of attainment for all. The present system has resulted in a far too large proportion of backward children, who enter the secondary schools unable to read. This problem can be met. One class entering with an average reading age of 7.2 changed this in eighteen months to an average of 11.4, but this should have been done in the primary school. No child should enter the secondary school unable to read fluently or without a mastery of the tools needed for the next stage in his education.

It is often said that the teachers are against comprehensive schools, but this is only true of a few who wish to preserve the educational advantages and privileges of a minority. This is not surprising for most teachers have been brought up within the established system, with a belief in intelligence testing and streaming. This attitude is breaking down with experience, the many visits to comprehensive schools, the accounts of what has been achieved so far, the experience of teachers working in them, are all contributing to a change of outlook. Very few teachers who have had the opportunity of teaching in a comprehensive school would ever go back to any other kind. The local authorities who are proposing to institute comprehensive schools would be well advised to have informed discussions with their staffs in advance.

But above all, the attitude of the Ministry must be changed. From the first exclusion by Florence Horsbrugh of the grammar school from Kidbrook,

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after the initial scheme had been approved, to the constant antagonism there must be a change, and a change founded on a belief in the children's potentialities and a desire to see that all the nation's children have an equal opportunity in education up to and including the universities.

The class system of education must end and the views expressed by Thomas Smyth at the Cross Commission in 1857 put into operation:—

> "We believe that the children of the poor ought to be able to rise from the elementary school to the secondary schools and on to the universities—all educational facilities ought to be equal and open to all classes. We feel it is necessary to have all roads to education open, free and unfettered to the people."

Against the revision of Lenin's conception of nation

I. Potekhin

IN his article "On African Nations", published in the March issue of *Marxism Today*, B. R. Mann most resolutely rejects my conclusions tending to show that by the beginning of colonisation the African people had not yet formed nations, and that it is only now that the process of the formation of nations is under way in Africa.[1] Let us examine his arguments.

Argument 1. Marx and Engels "freely wrote of nations of antiquity, and Engels e.g. examined the genesis of the German nation after the breakdown of the Roman empire".

In one of my works I have already indicated that "the works of Marx and Engels do not yet contain a precise definition of nations and narodnost".[2] It cannot be expected that the works of the founders of Marxism can give answers to all the questions of proletarian revolutionary theory. Marxist theory develops in unity with practice, on the foundation of general conclusions drawn from the practical experience of the labour movement. Neither the tasks of the international Communist movement of the time nor the problem of the theoretical struggle of that period demanded a precise scientific definition of the term "nation". The necessity of such a definition arose later, in the early twentieth century, when the centre of the revolutionary movement shifted to Russia with her multi-national population. This definition was formulated in the process of the sharp struggle of revolutionary Marxism against reformism. In those times great popularity was enjoyed by the theory and programme worked out for the solution of the national question by the Austrian Social-Democrats R. Springer and O. Bauer. In Russia it was used by the Bund members and the Mensheviks as a weapon in the bitter fight with the revolutionary wing of the Russian Social-Democrats headed by V. I. Lenin. This theory and programme were ruinous for the labour movement, as they led to the inculcation of the ideas and principles of bourgeois nationalism in the midst of the labour movement, and to the splitting of the working class due to national motives.

It was then that V. I. Lenin entrusted to J. V. Stalin the task of writing a work setting forth the Marxist theory of the national question. J. V. Stalin carried out this mission by preparing and publishing his work *Marxism and the National Question*,[3] which became widely known. Here the definition of the term "nation" was formulated for the first time. This definition was based on V. I. Lenin's well-known thesis of the connection between the process of the formation of nations and the development of the capitalist method of production—a thesis which Lenin expressed as early as 1894 in his book *Who the "Friends of the People" Are and how they Fight the Social-Democrats.*

The force and vitality of Marxist theory lie precisely in the fact that it is never at a standstill, but that it moves and develops. It is the merit of the Russian Marxists that in the new historic period of imperialism they not only defended Marxism against the attacks of the reformists but developed it further and enriched it with new

[1] I. Potekhin. "The Formation of Nations in Africa". *Marxism Today*, October 1958.

[2] I. Potekhin. *The Formation of the National Community of the South African Bantu.* M., 1955, p. 32.

[3] J. V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question, Collected Works*, Vol. 2.

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theoretical discoveries. The precise definition given to the term of "nation" was one of these discoveries. Therefore nowadays anyone who wishes to be a Marxist, and who knows the history of Marxist theory, must look for a definition of "nation" in the works of Lenin and Stalin and not in those of Marx and Engels.

B. R. Mann knows the definition of a nation given by Stalin; he quotes it in his article and does not object to it. The reader has the impression that B. R. Mann agrees with the definition and that consequently what he opposes is not the definition but merely the conclusions drawn by Potekhin. In fact, however, he comes out against the definition of "nation" which is generally adopted in Marxist literature.

Argument 2. The emergence of nations is not connected with capitalism. "Presence or absence of capitalism has no bearing on the existence or non-existence of the nations of Africa. . . .

"Capitalism does not create the nations, it presupposes their existence. . . ." "Nations . . . existed from the dawn of history."

This is not a new viewpoint. It is widely known and is considered as generally accepted in bourgeois sociology. In our times this view is used by the opponents of the national sovereignty of peoples and states. In his book *The Idea of Nationalism*, the American sociologist Hans Kohn, who is one of the apostles of cosmopolitanism, maintains that the idea and form of nationalism were already developed by the ancient Greeks and Hebrews, and that in our days nation is a survival of the period of barbarity and savagery.[4]

But this viewpoint has nothing in common with the Marxist-Leninist views of nations and the national question. In his work *Karl Marx*, written in 1914, V. I. Lenin formulated one of the basic ideas of the Marxist teaching on nations and the national question with explicit clarity, permitting no misinterpretation:

"Nations are the inevitable product and the inevitable form of the bourgeois epoch in social development."[5]

J. V. Stalin developed Lenin's idea on this matter. Replying to a group of comrades, he wrote in 1929:

> "Your erroneous assertions notwithstanding, there were no nations in the pre-capitalist period, nor could there be, because there were as yet no national markets and no economic or cultural national centres, and, consequently, there were none of the factors which put an end to the economic disunity of a given people and draw its hitherto disunited parts together into one national whole."[6]

It seems clear that the viewpoint of B. R. Mann is in direct contradiction with that of V. I. Lenin. Yet the reader has the impression that he fully agrees with V. I. Lenin as, in order to refute my conclusions, he quotes V. I. Lenin, but at the same time misinterprets him. The reader is brought to believe that B. R. Mann refutes Potekhin, while in reality it is Lenin he refutes.

Maybe Lenin is wrong? So far I have no reason for entering into a discussion on this subject. If B. R. Mann considers V. I. Lenin to be wrong, we can argue on this question.

Argument 3. The African peoples have traversed a long path of development. "They have built up their civilisation, their towns and cities based on handicrafts and trade, erected their own states. . . . Not until quite recently were their economies ruined and their countries carved up among the colonial powers."

All this is true, and I have not the slightest intention of denying it. On the contrary, I have long ago had the opportunity of making similar statements to this effect. I can mention my booklet *L'Afrique est-elle un continent arrière?* which was published in 1955 by the French magazine *La Nouvelle Critique*. I quite agree with B. R. Mann in his evaluation of the historic past of the African peoples, but what has this to do with our discussion? There is hardly anyone who can doubt that in the nineteenth century the level of development of the Russian people was not below that of the African peoples, yet Russian Marxists unanimously recognise that the process of the formation of the Russian nation was only completed in the second half of the nineteenth century. More than that, we consider that some of the peoples of tsarist Russia had not even developed into nations before the victory of the October Socialist Revolution, that in some of them the process of the formation of nations is under way only now, in the period of socialism, and that they are becoming not bourgeois, but socialist nations.

I do not like to quote the works of the classical writers of Marxist literature without necessity. For instance, in my article "The Formation of Nations in Africa" I did not use a single quotation. But as B. R. Mann quotes Marx, Engels and Lenin and leaves the reader under the impression that he is in full agreement with them, I shall take the liberty of introducing one quotation from V. I. Lenin's works.

Referring to the medieval, i.e. pre-capitalist, period of Russian history, he wrote that "one could hardly speak of national ties in the true sense of the word

[4] Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*. New York, 1945.

[5] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Ed. 4, Vol. 21, p. 56.

[6] J. V. Stalin, *The National Question and Leninism*, Vol. 11, p. 351.

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at that time: the state was divided into separate 'lands', sometimes even principalities, which preserved strong traces of former autonomy, peculiarities in the administration, at times their own troops (the local boyars went to war at the head of their own companies), their own customs frontiers, and so forth. Only the modern period of Russian history (beginning approximately with the seventeenth century) is characterised by an actual amalgamation of all such regions, lands and principalities into a single whole. This amalgamation . . . was brought about by the growth of exchange between regions, the gradual growth of commodity circulation and the concentration of the small local markets into a single all-Russian market. Since the leaders and masters of this process were the merchant capitalists, the creation of these national ties was nothing but the creation of bourgeois ties".[7]

V. I. Lenin gives here a sufficiently clear picture of the formation of the Russian nation in connection with the development of capitalism. This process began in the seventeenth century and was completed only in the second half of the nineteenth century.

To confirm his conclusions, B. R. Mann points to the Chinese nation. Yet according to the general opinion held by Russian Marxists, the Chinese nation completed the process of its formation as late as the end of the nineteenth century. This viewpoint was notably expressed in the article "On the Formation of the Chinese Nation" by G. V. Efimov.[8] The publication of this article gave rise to a discussion among Chinese scholars. Fan Wen-lan, for instance, maintained that the Chinese nation had been formed as early as the period between the fourth century B.C. and the third century A.D. Yet the majority of the participants in the discussion did not agree with Fan Wen-lan. "The Han nation could not be born amidst feudal society, and neither was it born in that period. The formation of the Han bourgeois nation began only after the emergence of capitalism", writes Chen Wen-ching (p. 38).[9] Most Chinese Marxists are of the opinion that the beginning of capitalism in China should be dated by the period of the so-called opium wars.

In connection with the problem of the historical limits in which a nation exists, the question arises, what terms should be used to designate the stage of the ethnical development of a people, or the form of its ethnic community, which precedes a nation. The Russian Marxists proposed the term "narodnost" which unfortunately has no equivalent in the West European languages. The letter which I received after the publication of my article contained the proposal of translating the word "narodnost" as "pre-nation". This term has, however, the drawback of obliterating the difference between a tribe and a narodnost. If the participants in the discussion should offer some other term for "narodnost", their suggestions could be discussed.

B. R. Mann ascribes to me the introduction into science of the word "narodnost". I must point out that this honour is not mine. This term has been in existence in Russian literature for a long time already. In the early works of J. V. Stalin, the term "narodnost" is used as a synonym of "nationality" (not nation!). Its use introduced a certain terminological mix-up, as in the Russian language the term "nationality" is used to indicate the affinity of a person to a certain nation ("What is your nationality?", i.e., to what nation do you belong?). It is also used as a formal designation of all and any peoples, both those which have developed into nations and those which have not done so. "The House of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R." means the assembly of delegates representing the peoples of the U.S.S.R. and nothing else. In order to avoid this terminological ambiguity, J. V. Stalin unified the terminology when he was preparing the collection of his works for publication, and replaced everywhere the term "nationality" by the term "narodnost".

The essence of the question is whether Lenin's thesis of a nation as the inevitable product and the inevitable form of the bourgeois period of social development is recognised or rejected. In case of recognition, this must lead to the adoption of the division of the ethnic history of peoples into three stages: tribe, narodnost and nation.

Dealing with the question of the formation of nations in Africa, I proceed precisely from this thesis established by V. I. Lenin, as I declare with complete clarity in my book *The Formation of the National Community of the South African Bantu.* B. R. Mann does not recognise Lenin's thesis, and therefore declares that nations "existed from the dawn of history".

When applied to Africa, this assertion by B. R. Mann is in blatant contradiction with reality. The misfortune of the African peoples lies notably in the fact that the four centuries of slave trading and colonial domination have delayed their social and economic development, and their transition from a tribal organisation to a nation, and that the colonialists are now skilfully using the tribal division of the peoples to weaken the anti-imperialist movement. Side Shoyinka is undoubtedly right when he says: ". . . one of the causes of our backwardness had been our tribal

[7] V. I. Lenin, *What the "Friends of the People" Are and how they Fight the Social-Democrats.*

[8] *Voprosy Istorii*, 1953, No. 10.

[9] See collection of articles *Discussion on the Formation of Han Nations*, Peking, 1957. (In Chinese.)

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groupings . . . let us start now to think about the idea of one people and one nation".[10]

I had a chance to attend the All-African People's Conference, where the problem of combating tribalism was one of the items on the agenda. This is what the Preparatory Committee of the Conference said about this question in its address:

> "The time has come for an open exposure of, and an onslaught upon, the propagators of tribalism, who are today the most dangerous black agents of the imperialists for it is their poisonous policy of inciting Africans against Africans, brothers against brothers, tribes against tribes, which constitutes the greatest obstacle to the achievement of the *United Freedom Fighters' Fronts.*"

The passionate call of the Conference to fight against tribalism in no way corroborates the standpoint expressed by B. R. Mann that nations in Africa were formed at the dawn of history, but it is in full harmony with my opinion that the process of the formation of nations is not yet completed, and that the survivals of the tribal organisation are still alive and rather strong. I do not give here any arguments to confirm my view concerning the level of the ethnical development of the African peoples, for I have already set them forth in my preceding article. B. R. Mann does not refute any of these arguments. Should he oppose their essence, this would give me a reason for coming out with new factual material for their substantiation.

One of my correspondents puts me a question. He wants to know how we can speak about nationalism or nationalist movements in Africa if we deny the existence of nations there. This question is incorrectly formulated. I do not deny the existence of nations in contemporary Africa. I say that African peoples are living through the process of the formation of nations, that nations are still in the process of development there, and that this process has not yet been completed. The colonial regime is the principal obstacle in the way to the completion of this process. The fight for doing away with colonialism is waged for the elimination of obstacles standing in the way of the free development of nations, for the creation of national economy, for the flowering of national culture and achievements in the field of national vernacular languages. These objective requirements of national development find their expression in national ideology and in nationalism, which is the banner of anti-imperialist people's movements. Consequently, there is no contradiction whatsoever between my conception of the national development of African peoples and the presence of national ideology.

My correspondent makes a mistake when he supposes that national ideology appears *after* the process of the formation of nations has been completed. In fact, the formation of nations and that of national ideology occur *simultaneously* and run parallel to each other. The material prerequisites of a nation's existence—common territory, language, culture and economy—do not appear all of a sudden and do not fall out of the blue. They are formed gradually, in the course of many generations, and develop in dialectical unity. The presence of these prerequisites forms the material base for the emergence and development of national ideology. Like any other progressive ideology, it exercises a reciprocal influence upon the process of the formation of nations, accelerating the development of certain aspects of this process, notably language and culture. It inspires the masses of the people to fight for doing away with the barriers hampering free national development. This is the case with all kinds of ideas. The idea of Communism did not appear after the transformation of bourgeois society into a Communist one, but long before this transformation, and became a powerful means of transformation. The development of ideology cannot be reduced mechanically to the development of the material conditions of social life—it has its own interior laws. All these are elementary truths of Marxism. To remain on Marxist ground, one cannot counterpose the final stages in the process of formation of nations to the emergence and development of national ideology.

[10] *West Africa*, January 24th, 1959, p. 88.

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History and human destiny

John Lewis

"HISTORY is no joke, because she has skeletons in her cupboard—not just one skeleton but perhaps about twenty of them. They are the skeletons of civilisations that have come to grief in the past."[1] With these words Arnold Toynbee reveals his Cassandra role as the prophet of woe of our generation. True, the sentence of doom is mitigated by the faint hope of escape, but the feeling grows that Toynbee himself has little hope of a happy issue out of all our afflictions.

But if the story he tells of the rise and fall of civilisations is a depressing one, it is a philosophy of history and, in an age whose meaning few seem to know, the very existence of such a study seems like a promise that there may be some light in the darkness of our ignorance after all.

Toynbee's method is to set the history and prospects of the present age against the background of the history of every civilisation known to man, and to show that there is a repeated pattern, a set of historical laws, that govern the rise and fall of human societies.

Toynbee's *Study of History* arouses the suspicion that it is a philosophy designed to rationalise defeat, to rationalise it not only by showing the inevitability of the decline of the West, but somehow to find consolation in the fact that twenty previous civilisations have taken the same road to ruin. Confronted with the mounting contradictions of our society, the bankruptcy of our ruling class and the sense of imminent collapse, the whole blame is put on the cycle of rise and fall. And here, at the very outset, we must realise that a metaphysical system is being clamped down on the facts of history, an imposed destiny which drags every civilisation irresistibly through this cycle.

Popper's condemnation of historicism is justly levelled at Toynbee's system. Here, indeed, is a fate or destiny which shapes our ends and leaves us very little responsibility for the making of history. When Toynbee tells us that he has revealed "a law which knows no limit as to its validity", is not the historian himself playing providence and inventing the pattern which gives sense to history? He ignores altogether the actual process by which men make a society of a particular pattern. They do not, in fact, do this because their minds are the mere vehicles of a transcendental Idea—the Idea, shall we say, of Greco-Roman or medieval civilisation, but because primarily they are wresting a living from nature and are using various techniques, all of human invention, and have organised themselves in appropriate ways.

Toynbee fails to understand that it is "the sum total of these relations of production" that constitute "the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness".[2]

This is clearly seen when he is discussing the change from medievalism to modern industrialism. For him this is a sharp break marking a change of mental pattern. Within each pattern everything is determined by the Idea of that form of civilisation. In point of fact, the transition to the modern world can only be understood on the basis of a study of scientific and economic development. We shall then see that the modern world appears in embryonic form in the medieval world. The change of world view is not arbitrary, is not metaphysical or merely ideological; it is the adaptation and reorganisation first of the relations between men, as guilds and serfdom and the small craftsmen give way to machinery and factory and wage labour, and then of political and legal forms, ethics and religion (as described by Weber and Tawney), and art and literature.

Challenge and Response

Toynbee's history is almost exclusively political and military, and entirely ignores the progressive control over the environment which underlies and binds together the whole sequence of civilisation, nor does his emphasis on war pay the slightest attention to the importance of class war and the economic causes of war.

Toynbee seeks to show that the basic law underlying and revealing itself in the succession of civilisations is that of *challenge and response*. The challenge may be that of difficult conditions, an external challenge, but as man develops he will be confronted with a *spiritual* challenge; the mastery not of the environment but of his own soul. All civilisations are attempts to transmute gross human nature into a finer substance, to ascend from the human condition "to the height of some superhuman kind of being in a Communion of Saints".

Every successful advance is the work not of the imitative mass but of the chosen few, for Toynbee is

[1] Toynbee, A., *A Study of History.*

[2] Marx, *Critique of Political Economy.*

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thoroughly undemocratic and has little respect for the inert rabble. But the creative *élite* eventually becomes sterile and decadent, a mere privileged and dominant minority; the inert mass is transformed into an alienated internal proletariat, concerned solely with its physical survival; and beyond the frontiers the barbarian external proletariat batters at the gates.

Out of such a crisis men seek, in our time, two ways of escape: back to nationalism and the archaic, the way of the bourgeoisie, or forward to the welfare state, the way of the people; but neither aim can be attained since both are worldly and not religious solutions.

We should pause here to compare this explanation with the Marxist, which holds that decline sets in when the ever-developing methods of production find an insuperable obstacle in the class system appropriate enough to the earlier stages of the productive process. The drive to reorganise the system comes from new social groups which have already arisen within the old system as an essential part of its industrial development. All this is admirably seen in the rise of the bourgeoisie in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and their clash with the representatives of the older feudal society. It is when a class declines because it obstructs economic expansion that it becomes moribund, obscurantist and defeatist in its ideology, and unable any longer to lead the rest of society forward, and therefore resorts to force, to dictatorial and repressive measures to prevent the advance to a new order of society under the leadership of a new class.

The Decline and Fall of Civilisations

The subsequent fate of society, according to Toynbee, must be summarised very briefly. The "Time of Troubles" is now upon it; wars break out and to stave off complete collapse a world state is formed, but peace merely delays breakdown, for already mortal wounds have been inflicted on a stricken society. Once a civilisation has reached the stage of the "Universal State", as Rome did, it is almost certainly too late for it to recover.

There is not a word here about the social and economic causes which actually brought about the fall of the Roman Empire. It is instructive to compare the attribution of decline to "spiritual sickness" itself, uncaused, or self-caused as when sin is attributed to sinfulness, with the ascertainable and concrete causes to which a social and economic analysis leads us.[3] The difference is almost exactly that between the days of pre-scientific medicine—diseases sprang up spontaneously from fluids within the body or descended upon them from emanations, night air and what not, and young ladies fell into a decline—with the precise investigation of bacterial and functional diseases of today. Toynbee is clearly entirely within the mythological phase of explanation.

The historical cycle is completed by the appearance within the internal proletariat of a spiritually-minded minority which rejects the blood and iron of revolution and the materialism of social reform, looking beyond this earthly state to a heavenly city. The discovery of a new religion restarts civilisation and the whole process starts again.

A Reactionary Theory

The application to ourselves is obvious. This is a diagnosis of our own times. But that it seriously offers a cure is difficult to accept. If we ask whether our civilisation will be reprieved, we shall find in Toynbee's answer his real contribution to the contemporary debate.

1. To save our civilisation we must turn our backs completely on humanism and on science. The decline of civilisation is due to the presumption of worshipping human reason.

2. The sin of our age, the fall of man, is trying to organise society independently of the religious vision which alone keeps society alive, and trying to base our moral convictions on purely secular postulates.

Toynbee thus abandons the progressive and scientific conception of human development, condemning as irreligious and presumptuous the patient efforts of countless generations to improve their material welfare, and entirely failing to do justice to the great moral idea that the exploited should emancipate themselves instead of waiting for acts of charity on the part of their masters.

From the depths of his despair and fear Toynbee turns to seek salvation for his doomed civilisation in the arms of an ancestral church and in the coming of a new race of men who bring miraculous vision with them. How we are to recognise this vision as authentic he does not tell us, and since, for him, reason is incompetent he deprives us of our only instrument for the purpose. "The swift succession of catastrophic events on a steeply mounting gradient inevitably inspires a dark doubt about our future, and this doubt threatens to undermine our faith and hope at a critical eleventh hour which calls for the utmost exertion of those saving spiritual faculties. . . . We may and must pray that a reprieve which God has granted to our society once will not be refused if we ask for it again in a humble spirit and with a contrite heart."[4]

Toynbee versus Marx

There is about this grandiose theory something reminiscent of Hegel and rather like a parody of Marx. The unity and interrelatedness of each

[3] See F. W. Walbank, *The Decline of the Roman Empire in the West.*

[4] Somervell, *Abridgement of a Study of History.*

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civilisation is Hegelian, and we find reminiscences of Marx not only in some of this Hegelianism, but also in his deliberate use of the term proletariat; his theory of its revolt against the dominant minority. It is almost as though he were saying: Marx, poor fellow, was feeling after the truth, but he got it all wrong. *These* are the real contradictions. *This* is what the proletariat really means and this is how the social struggle really ends.

It is not only a queer parody of Marxism; its Hegelianism too is open to question. Even Marxism can be Hegelianised to mean a sort of inevitable fate or destiny moving us irresistibly on to socialism. There is little excuse in Marx, or Engels, or Lenin for any such distortion, but it has occasionally happened, and Marxists are not only refuting a misrepresentation but guarding themselves against distortions when they assert, as they constantly do, that the theory is not derived from pure thought and then imposed on the facts, but is a generalisation from the facts. As Engels says: "There could be no question of building the laws of dialectics into nature, but of discovering them in it and evolving them from it. . . . Nature is the test of dialectics."

"Truth is always concrete", said Lenin, it is never arrived at by formulating some general theory, some abstraction and then fitting the facts into it.

The historical process is not a force compelling men to move and behave in a certain way, for man makes his own history at every stage; it is not the mechanical evolution of technique that moulds the development of man, but man himself who uses all his wits in the struggle with nature to learn her secrets, discover her laws, devise tools and methods of production, improve and revolutionise these, press on with new inventions. It is man who organises the most appropriate forms of labour and co-operation, who creates class divisions, discovers the inadequacy of the earlier form as he himself pushes on with improved techniques and new productive methods, and reforms the social structure by bringing new groups into the lead.

Marxism Not Determinist

Marxists are also conscious of the fact that while each system is a unity, its pattern depending ultimately on its basic social structure—the human relationships in production, whether slave, or feudal or capitalist—yet this is a totally different theory from the immediate determination of every detail and every aspect of social life by the Spirit or Idea of the whole, every part interlocking with every other part in a mechanical system no part of which could be other than it is. This may be Hegel; it is certainly Toynbee, and it is what Popper and other critics have rightly condemned as determinism; but it is not Marxism. Marxism sees a good deal of overlap between one epoch and the next, so that feudal institutions continue to exist well into the industrial period. It points out that important elements in the superstructure, just because people are unaware of their ultimate dependence on the social basis, obtain a considerable measure of relative independence—this is well seen in law, religion, art and ethics.

Law, for instance, will follow a course of independent development almost as though certain absolute and self-sufficient principles were being gradually discovered and embodied. But the Marxist also sees clearly that a legal system may cease to conform to the new relations in which men stand towards each other in the social process of production; hence the growing need to provide a new legal expression of these relations. Even if the recognition of this need may lag, it does in the long run keep in the wake of these social changes.

Similarly, forms of conduct and ethical principles become inadequate when society moves on to new forms and will have to be adapted, extended and reformed to express the interests of the dominant class.

Marxism and the Accidents of History

Marxism also explicitly allows for the effect of the accidents of history, as Engels says. "World history would indeed be very easy to make, if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable changes. It would on the other hand be of a very mystical nature, if accidents played no part. Acceleration and delay are very dependent upon such accidents, which include the accident of the character of those who at first stand at the head of the movement".[5]

Nor does Marxism fail to understand the role of personality of great men in historical development; but it understands, as exponents of the Hero-in-History theory do not, that no man however able and forceful can permanently deflect the course of history according to his own conceptions, and no hero-saint however holy can mould civilisation according to some absolute ideal or pattern. The great man, the man who really makes history, will be he who discerns the real trend of events, what is dying and what is coming to birth, who uses all his genius, his energy and his power to work with the conditions he finds around him.

Of course, individuals can influence the fate of society, but as Plekhanov said: "The possibility of exercising this influence, and its extent, are determined by the form of organisation of society, by the relation of forces within it. The character of an individual is a factor in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such."[6] Nor can an individual

[5] *Marx-Engels Correspondence*. Marx to Kugelmann, April 17th, 1871.

[6] Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History*.

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arrest or deflect the course of history so that the final outcome of events is the opposite of what it would have been without them. "They can change the individual features of events and some of their particular consequences, but they cannot change their general *trend*."

Plekhanov also points out that personalities who become effective in changing events are themselves the product of the trend they come to represent and lead.

"A great man is great not because his personal qualities give individual features to great historical events, but because he possesses qualities which make him most capable of serving the great social needs of his time, needs which arise as a result of general and special causes."[7] What Carlyle called the Hero in History is indeed indispensable, he sees further than others, he understands the problems with the scientific precision which discovers the solution, "he points to the new social needs created by the preceding development of social relationships. . . . His activities are the conscious and free expression of this necessary and unconscious course. Herein lies all his significance: herein lies his whole power. But this significance is colossal, and the power is terrible."[8]

If anyone thinks that this dependence upon and recognition of conditions and necessities takes away or diminishes freedom, let him consider that a great world-shattering theory like that of Copernicus, or Galileo, or Darwin, is discovered when genius, and it is genius, recognises its objectivity and therefore its necessity; when there is no other possible alternative. Not only is this one of the highest achievements of creative mind, of free thought, but its consequences in every field are incalculable and are influential in technological, economic and social political changes and not merely in the development of theoretical science.

Or consider the fact that in the *absence* of the hero, and his knowledge and perception of the requirements and opportunities of the situation, things do not move irresistibly forward without him. His perception and understanding is a necessary factor along with the conditions in the change which takes place, just as the existence of the solar system was not enough, it had to be recognised, understood, believed and acted upon. It had even to be fought for and a great victory won over those who denied it.

Therefore:

> "Marxism does not at all deny the role played by outstanding individuals or that history is made by people. . . . But, of course, people do not make history according to the promptings of their imagination or as some fancy strikes them. Every new generation encounters definite conditions already existing, ready-made when that generation was born. And great people are worth anything at all only to the extent that they are able correctly to understand these conditions, to understand how to change them. . . . Thus it is precisely Marx's view that people must not be counterposed to conditions. It is people who make history, but they do so only to the extent that they correctly understand the conditions that they have found ready-made, and only to the extent that they understand how to change those conditions."
>
> (Stalin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XIII. Interview with Emil Ludwig.)

Marxism and Freedom

If anyone imagines that working with objective conditions is determinist he has clearly not the faintest conception of what freedom really is. Freedom that is completely independent of causal sequences and external conditions is the irresponsible freedom of the lunatic in which everything happens at random and nothing at all can be counted upon, and, in fact, is not freedom at all but conduct determined by prejudice, neurotic impulses or psychotic compulsion, or the blind ignorance of the operative causes which renders one's most determined efforts completely futile.

Real freedom is action based on knowledge. The existence of stable laws and fixed conditions in our environment is absolutely essential if we are to be able to control events and achieve our human ends—if we are to be free. Nor does freedom mean the absence of all limitations on our behaviour or of causes for what we do. Behaviour which is independent of conditions is madness and all rational conduct must have a reason. It is only coercion or psychological obsession that takes away freedom, and they are in a different category altogether from the activity of the reason which takes conditions into account and makes use of them, and which achieves its ends by taking advantage of causal law.

Marxism and Dogma

Marxism again rejects entirely the method of keeping the theory intact by fiddling the facts. A dogmatic and metaphysical system never changes because in the first place it is not a guide to action but an explanation, and in the second place it is not subject to verification by subsequent observation and experiment. Marxist theory, being scientific theory, is definitely truth for action, and when applied corrects itself and thus sharpens the instrument for the next experiment; thus it is continually being applied as a hypothesis, it is always more or less provisional, always known to be but partially true, always capable of amendment and revision in the light of new facts. Thus we see Marxism changing and growing during the lifetime of its founders and considerably enlarged and modified by Lenin,

[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*

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Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, so much so indeed that crocodile tears are wept by anti-Communist writers, expressing the deepest concern that Lenin spoiled the perfection of Marxism, as though the one thing they desired was a more perfect revolutionary socialist theory; others, well after the death of Lenin, are full of praise for the man they hated and derided during his lifetime and of hypocritical regret for Stalin's alleged betrayal of Leninism; others again express delight that Mao Tse-tung has departed from the strict orthodoxy of Stalinism, and secretly hope that this may mean the abandonment or compromising of Marxism.

It is amusing to note that the critics cannot make up their mind as to whether Marxism is to be damned as a rigid and inflexible metaphysical dogma or a pragmatic, changing collection of expedients entirely without principle or basic theory. This attack from opposite quarters might be regarded as good evidence that Marxism is indeed a definite theory, but a flexible and growing one.

Man Makes His Own History

The immense gulf between Toynbee and Marx is that the Marxist sees the forces of change quite concretely, and always operating through the human mind and will in purposeful action. What is being accomplished is the progressive mastery, that is the progressive rationalisation and humanising of the environment to achieve the greater welfare of man. Now these are the very things that Toynbee fears and condemns as human pride and sin. Like Zeus he is indignant and aghast that Prometheus should bring to men light and fire and knowledge, and if he could he would chain him to the rocks in perpetual durance. Toynbee's whole philosophy negates the purpose and end of human striving and history, and distorts every achievement of the race into a moral catastrophe and a sin against God. Seldom if ever in the history of human thought has a whole movement—for this anti-humanism has Toynbee only as one, if perhaps its most distinguished representative—turned upon the human enterprise in such a spirit of negation and despair (perhaps Augustine in the days of the decline of Rome may have taken such a course). It surely indicates a real collapse of the ideology which reflects and supports the last stages of a dying system.

One might ask those who are so confident about the permanence and superiority of what they call the "free world", why it is that their own most distinguished thinkers and prophets can do nothing but denigrate the whole human achievement and see little in the modern world but the devastating effects of human pride and sin. Is it because they dare not turn the eyes with any degree of objectivity to the renascent forces and emerging phenomena of the world that is to be?

Plays for the people?

Michael A. Cohen

IT is eighteen months since Tom Vaughan's article on the theatre appeared in *Marxism Today*[1] and failed to elicit any further discussion. Since then there have been developments on the British stage which Vaughan was not in a position to analyse at that time, although he showed himself well aware of their beginnings. There has been the appearance of an increasing number of new "progressive" plays. There has also been the advance of a number of theatrical bodies—several of them new—which support such plays, as well as serious works for the stage in general. Theatre Workshop, the English Stage Company, the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, the New Shakespeare Theatre, in Liverpool, the Mermaid Theatre, are examples which spring to mind. Any increase in the opportunities for performing the works of our great cultural heritage must be a source of satisfaction to Communists. But what of the new "progressive" plays? What contribution, if any, are they making to progress in the British theatre, to the solution of the many problems to which Tom Vaughan drew attention?

It is necessary to ask, in the first place, what is a progressive play? I suggest that there is a minimum demand which we can make on any new play and that is that its performance will help the British people to face and to comprehend the realities of their increasingly grim situation in 1959. Any new play which fails to pass this test is either trivial or evil or both. What we need are plays with a vision which will help to smash, not to perpetuate, the massive dictation of mental environment which the capitalist class exercises through press, radio, television, education, rock 'n roll and culture in general. For this reason Priestley's television play about the

[1] Tom Vaughan, "The Theatre in Britain Today", *Marxism Today*, January 1959.

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terrible aftermath of atomic war had strong progressive features even though it was written from a liberalistic standpoint considerably removed from that of the Communist Party. To what extent do the works of such authors as Osborne, Mankowitz, Delaney, Willis Hall, and Behan measure up to the demand? I should like to attempt to answer this question by reference to two (necessarily arbitrary) groups of plays.

The first is formed by the satirical musicals, *Expresso Bongo*, *The Hostage* and *The World of Paul Slickey*. When *Expresso Bongo* first appeared there were those who detected in it the influence of Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*. But the British stage has a tradition of popular social and political satire to which *Expresso Bongo* is also related, a tradition which goes back long before Brecht, and to which Brecht himself was indebted in composing *The Threepenny Opera*. Just over two hundred years ago John Gay and Henry Fielding wrote their ballad operas and satirical extravaganzas which pilloried every aspect of the corrupt eighteenth-century Whig order. They hit out with deadly irony at the bribing, grabbing, election-rigging politicians, and the flood of rubbishy journalism, literature and decadent theatrical entertainments produced in an increasingly commercialised culture. Central to their satiric vision was the analogy which they drew between the moral code of cut-throats, thieves, whores and pimps in London's underworld and that of the ruling class. The plays of both men were immensely popular (Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) and Fielding's *Pasquin* (1736) both achieved record-breaking runs for their day) and both men were very conscious of the role which the theatre could play in exposing social abuses. As Gay put it:

> "Yet there are ways for authors to be great
> With rancorous libels to reform the state".

The efficacy of Fielding's "rancorous libels" received a profound tribute when Sir Robert Walpole put through the Licensing Act of 1737 to drive them from the stage.

Since this period we have had Gilbert and we have had Shaw (Shaw regarded Fielding as the greatest English dramatist between Shakespeare and the nineteenth century). But in the past three decades there has been little social satire of any seriousness on the British stage apart from works performed in the Unity theatres. The fashionable revues which regale the West End are a mere shadow of real satire, avoiding as they do the central, essentially political, targets of society and therefore the seriousness which is basic to real satire.

Now, I have no intention of claiming that *Expresso Bongo* is of the same stature as *The Beggar's Opera* but with its witty exposure of rock 'n roll as a racket, and its exhilarating slashes at royalty and religion ("The Shrine on the Second Floor") it is a progressive step away from the voluntarily emasculated stock revues. On the same level is John Osborne's *The World of Paul Slickey*. *The World of Paul Slickey* is compromised by the sheer tastelessness and want of wit in the concluding episodes involving sex changes and Osborne's tendency to spray his satirical shot in too many directions at once—a characteristic directly related to his anarchistic standpoint. Nevertheless, the work does make forthright points against the H-bomb, against German rearmament, against the Tories, against Fleet Street, against those who condemn strikers. Despite the sickening anti-climax after the interval, I doubt if anyone could see the work without his anti-Toryism getting a healthy shot in the arm. There was an unmistakable roar of approval from the Leeds audience at Osborne's biting caricature of the Randolph Churchill type which was good to hear in a British theatre.

Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* surpasses both these works by being radical and consistently, uproariously funny. Behan, too, has the anarchist tendency to "laugh at everything" but his comedy is always effective (like a superior Goon show) and underlying it all, right at the centre of *The Hostage* is an uncompromising attack on British imperialism. The story is of Leslie, a young British national serviceman who is taken as hostage as a reprisal against the threatened execution of a young Irishman. He is eventually killed after having made close friends with some of his captors. His fate symbolises the common cause of the working people of Britain and those of the empire. It is good to have such a play in the West End.

To come to the second group, the "straight" plays: Willis Hall's *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* and the several works of Osborne. In what ways are these progressive? There is one feature of all these works which strikes me as undeniably progressive. They have brought back to the theatre a measure of the vitality of English popular speech. The verbal quality of the best parts of *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, *A Taste of Honey* and *The Entertainer* cannot be dismissed as a penchant for obscenity any more than the many Elizabethan plays which are not above the occasional indecency can be considered worthless. These dramatists have succeeded in concentrating for dramatic purposes some pithy idioms of our day—the vivid slang of the Services, the salty speech of Lancashire, the pyrotechnical wit of the non-U intellectuals. In doing so they have brought considerably more poetry back to the theatre than T. S. Eliot in his dead verse plays.

The dramatic speech in these plays is one aspect of their authors' success in hitting off real aspects of contemporary life. It has been argued recently that

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what passes for a progressive play these days is usually full of decadent characters quite untypical of the working class, a worthless evasion of the problems of ordinary people. It is true that *A Taste of Honey*, for example, deals with figures—the "semi-whore" Helen and itinerant boy friend Peter—who are not typical of the working class—the submerged tenth perhaps but not the majority. It is also true that this feature of the play may be largely responsible for its signal success with West End theatre audiences and critics. But *A Taste of Honey* is more than a mere step from a middle class to a working class off-beat bedroom. It cannot be dismissed simply because it deals with decadence, because there are strongly decadent elements in our society of which the working class is not entirely free. The question is with what quality of artistic vision is the decadence presented? If there is depth in an artist's portrayal of decadence then it will have something to say to all of us since decadence is part of the whole in which we live and move and have our being. *A Taste of Honey* is a serious work, a tragi-comedy. The tragic element is clearest in the treatment of Jo, the young girl deprived of help and security, who reaches out briefly and desperately for a "taste of honey" in a love affair with a coloured seaman, gets into trouble and finds herself inevitably pulled back into the same vortex as her mother before her. This picture of youthful confusion and defeat of youthful aspirations is surely typical enough of Britain today?

But, it may be argued, the play presents no "solution". The idea that a work of art necessarily presents a ready-made solution to the problems it poses is a well-worn fallacy which has been repeatedly refuted in Marxist aesthetic discussions. If our problems could be solved on the stage Communists would be best employed in amateur dramatics. It should not be forgotten that the problem of presenting a positive progressive force in art in decadent imperialist Britain is quite different from the problem as it faces Soviet writers. Optimistic elements also have to have their typicality to be true to life. The words of R. Palme Dutt seems very apposite here:

> "It is sometimes said by fools that Marxist literary criticism demands that the writer or artist must directly present a specific political conclusion in his work, must offer a ready-made formula to answer the problems of the situation he reveals. This is a caricature which would not survive five minutes' study of what Marx wrote on literature. The province of the writer is to see and to feel and to see life truthfully, with all the passion of his being and the strength of his understanding, and to depict it with a vision which illuminates the vision of all of us, makes the familiar new, awakens dulled and dormant capacities of feeling and deepens the sense and understanding of life and human relations. To draw the conclusions remains for the hearer, the viewer, the reader, for the process of thought. The most painstaking attempt to convey a possibly correct theoretical, moral, political or practical viewpoint or conclusion through the medium of a work of literature or art without the gift of direct artistic vision and feeling and illumination and the power to express it, could obviously be, at best, only well-intentioned failure, and, at worst, comic."[2]

A measure of "direct artistic vision and feeling and illumination and the power to express it" Shelagh Delaney certainly has and she has many years ahead in which to improve on *A Taste of Honey*.

None of this is said out of any inclination to overestimate the importance of such plays or the movement of which they are part. It is probably true that if the plays were any better they would not be so widely performed, certainly not in the West End. The fact remains that, for all their weaknesses, they do constitute an advance just as the increasing number of theatres which will present them constitutes an advance. Compared with five years ago there are more plays with qualities of realism and social consciousness on the stage. There are more theatres devoted to them and to the great works from the past and from overseas. These gains should be recognised by Communists who seek to unite with and advance all movements containing progressive elements.

[2] "Look Forward in Anger". *Labour Monthly*, April 1958.

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Discussion contributions:

On the artist and politics

Robbie Wilson

READING Arnold Kettle's article on "The Artist and Politics" one hardly knows whether to proffer first gratitude or compassion for his attempting so difficult a subject. No doubt he deserves both. For my part, I think he has done well, particularly because he points in various places to the more basic problem, that of the relationship of the individual to society. This problem seems to me to be quite fundamental, and from his article I judge that Arnold Kettle is of the same opinion. The artist is a particular kind of individual, with a particular kind of relationship to society. This relationship varies in detail from case to case, and from time to time, and from society to society. The same is true for anybody, whether they realise it or not. The artist probably realises it more clearly than most, and he may for various reasons like it or dislike it, as Arnold Kettle shows. But neither the artist nor anybody else can escape the fact that he has a relationship to society. He may not realise the fact; he may realise but dislike the fact; he may more or less ignore the fact, or fly in the face of the fact; but the fact remains. A man cannot eat a bite, can hardly even draw a breath, without a relationship to society being implied in even so simple an act. And that is true even in the world of ideas; for if a man does not breathe or eat, neither can he think. If he would paint, or write a book, or play the piano, then somebody must make the paper, the brushes, the pencils, pens, typewriters, keys, felts, wires, frames, easels, sounding boards; somebody must machine the wood, somebody must fell the trees, somebody must plant and grow them; ore must be mined and smelted, metal must be worked by machines that have to be made and men that have to be fed and housed and clothed. Crops and animals have to be raised for his food and his clothes; his waste paper and canvas, not to mention his own excreta, have to be disposed of. All this monstrous conglomerate of labour is necessary for the performance of his art. He cannot do it all, not the hundredth part of it. It has to be done by men and women, by society. And the same sort of thing is true for everybody. That is the way things are. That is the actual situation. And if the artists tried going back to the "simple life" they would soon find there was no time in it for art.

I had a good illustration of this a few years ago, when I went camping with my wife and two small children. The weather was very bad. We soon found, my wife and I, that we had no time for anything but keeping the fire going, cooking, eating and sleeping, and that in spite of having a car and being able to buy food in a town five miles away.

Socially Necessary Labour

I feel sure that no primitive society could "carry" an artist who did no chores. Now "chores" is really a pejorative word indicating socially necessary labour. One can see how in societies of increasing complexity and decreasing unity there arose division of labour, division of property, and division of privilege, so that some came to do the work that always had been socially necessary (and always will be) while others took on new tasks and others managed to get out of doing anything at all!

But in fact the new tasks were socially necessary, because they arose from man's discovering new capabilities in himself and new needs for himself arising from the new capabilities. And so, as centuries and millennia rolled by, socially useful work came increasingly to wear the aspect of a chore, and society became divided into the relatively large group that did the chores, and needed little education to do them, for the relatively small group of property owners who educated themselves for "higher things" and only educated the group of toilers to the degree that was socially necessary. (Ironical, that; to the degree that they thought socially necessary, for it was their society. And I feel quite sure that they thought the work of the artist was socially necessary, for artists gave much pleasure to them in their society.)

Now all this is all very well, but there is nothing at all original in it. The point is, however, that we now live in such a complex society that one can easily lose sight of the mountain of work that has to be done in order that we may all exist, let alone do anything more advanced. I think this has to be repeated again and again, if only because the present rulers of British society would like us to forget it. They want us to forget it, because they want to perpetuate the present unjust organisation of mankind. But we should remember it, in order that we may see how justice should be done to all men.

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I said above that "one can easily lose sight of the mountain of work etc.", and it may be objected that intellectuals may but workers cannot. It is quite true that those who work with their brains rather than their hands are more likely to forget; but it is not impossible for workers to forget, and capitalism tries in many ways to induce them to do so. The Tory slogan of "a property-owning democracy" is a case in point, and is in fact today's version of "giving the workers a stake in the country". And the staggering power of capitalism to influence people in this way is nowhere better seen than in the present role and programme of the Labour leadership.

The basis of the matter is that mankind has certain needs, for the satisfaction of which work is essential. It makes no difference that some of man's needs are "material" and some are "spiritual" or "intellectual"; none of them can be satisfied without work. Some of the work has to be done by the individual in need—that is, the work which immediately precedes the satisfaction of the need; but a greater amount of preparatory work, often vastly greater, has to be done by others, by society. So, as things are, everybody is constantly dependent on everybody else, pretty well every moment of his or her life, from the cradle to the grave . . . and indeed before and after!

Such is the relationship of the individual to society. And from that point it seems reasonable to propose that everybody has a duty to work and a right to the satisfaction of his or her needs. (I exclude the demarcation of an *élite* which might enjoy a diminished duty to work or an increased right to satisfaction, for I know of no facts to justify anything of the sort.)

The Artist in Society

I think the artist has to face this proposition, and ought to accept it. He has also to face and accept its corollary, that he owes it to society to work at his art, because other men and women need his work, just as he needs theirs. He himself is doubly fortunate, for not only does he work in order to eat but also because he himself feels a need to practise his art. The vast majority of men and women are obliged to take the first work that presents itself, simply in order to eat and without any reference to their own likings; indeed, often enough without any reference to their own capabilities, which may not have been developed and have probably not been investigated. (Hence the importance of being able to change one's work, in the wide and radical manner envisaged by Stalin in his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* published not long before his death.)

This having been said, I agree with Arnold Kettle that "it doesn't do much good simply to tell writers what they ought to write", though I consider that any individual or organisation in society has a right to say in general terms at least what sort of things writers should write, musicians should compose and so on. As for the Party, I cannot escape the conclusion that it has the unenviable duty to do so—but it does not follow that anything should be done that will restrict them to doing what the Party thinks should be done.

To elaborate a little: it would be correct or permissible to tell an artist that he should paint representational pictures and not abstract ones, but he should be unquestionably free to paint abstract pictures and to sell them to anybody who wants them; but it would be legitimate for any organisation seeking to commission a picture and remunerate the artist out of socially derived funds to stipulate that the picture should be representational or abstract or whatever they wished, so that they would have to find an artist who would meet their requirements, and artists who sought such commissions would have to recognise their obligations to these organisations as representatives of society. And similarly for sculpture, music, and so on. (Which isn't, I think very different from what happens in practice in Britain today. Anybody who thinks artists are free in this country ought to ask a professional pianist, for example, about the effect of "box office" and the profit motive on the programmes they are allowed to play—and I mean "allowed". The difference we want to make is to substitute social responsibility for responsibility to the pocket of the impresario and the agent.)

It's an old story, really, isn't it, this business of the contradiction between the needs of the individual and the needs of society. One could argue, however, that it is more apparent than real, this contradiction; for while society is made up of individuals, in the world today the individuals could not exist without society. It is an idea that springs from a divided society, from class society, and it will be a long time a-dying; but in a century or two it will sound very archaic. For thousands of years, religions have been trying to tell men how to be content in spite of their environment: but now Socialism is showing men how to master their environment in order to be content.

I am reminded of a discussion I once had with a friend, a novelist who is now quite well known. (This conversation took place nearly twenty years ago.) We were discussing the relationship of the individual to society, and my friend said, "What I want to do is to see myself against the pattern, standing out of the pattern", to which I replied, "What I want to do is to find my place in the pattern", which horrified her very much. Since then she has proceeded in her books to examine

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personal relationships with ever-increasing precision and delicacy, placing her characters in social settings increasingly aristocratic, and remote in history. It is clear that I failed lamentably to influence her! I for my part have the consciousness that I am in the swim of history, that I am facing the way mankind is going, and—here above all, how unlike her—that the future blazes with hope for all mankind. We are both children of capitalism, she and I, yet for some reason she has turned one way and I the other. Would that we knew how such changes may be wrought! And let it not be forgotten that her work has brought pleasure to as many millions of people as mine has been of benefit to thousands, essentially reactionary though her books may be. She had to work very hard, too, especially in those days; no independent means smoothed out her path, but an arduous job for bread and butter, and then at night to the book.

What Burns in Them?

Why did she do it? Why do so many other artists do it, in whatever art? What burns in them with so intolerable a fire, that can only by such labour be assuaged? I don't know, of course, any more than anybody else of them that have puzzled and yammered about it till all's blue; but I wonder if it may be a special form of whatever biological arrangement it is that makes living beings struggle to live and reluctant to die, a form peculiar to beings with brains of so remarkable a complexity as man's. Perhaps one should speak of a special development, rather than a special form, of this biological arrangement; but whatever it is, and however mysterious it is, there is no need to get mystical about it. We know as a matter of common observation that all human beings desire to stay alive, to be healthy, to enjoy themselves, to express themselves, according to the capabilities and inclinations that they have at any given stage of their personal development. This matter of common observation, this fact, seems to me the factual and material basis justifying the necessity on the part of society to make social and cultural services available to all mankind, to all individuals. The desire of the individual to flourish and develop underlies the rights of the individual in society, just as the interdependence of individuals underlies the duty of individuals to work for society. In the one case society has a duty to the individual, in the other the individual has a duty to society; while in each case there are reciprocal rights. Here we see, I think, the twin pillars of communist ethics.

The Question of Conscience

Ethics! Ha! Now we come naturally enough to the "conscience", the "inner censor", or "judgment", or what you will. A difficult matter. For my part I have no hesitation in preferring the term "judgment"; and I think that is what was meant by the Soviet writer mentioned by Doris Lessing. He had a conscience which operated over a far wider range than that of the artist's impulses—he had a social conscience, a judgment of his duty to society as well as his own rights in society. Such an inner censor should not be regarded as an enemy, even when at times it operates mistakenly. I agree with Arnold Kettle on this matter without any reserve.

It is a very difficult word, "conscience", especially because of the religious overlay which it has for many of us, the idea of the still, small voice of God within us, keeping us in the paths of righteousness. Then there are the two famous sayings of the two greatest English writers:

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all", and: "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely, according to conscience".

Now hundreds of lines have been written about the meaning of the word "conscience" in these two quotations, but I wonder if "judgment" would not do? Hamlet goes on:

"And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of *thought*."

And Milton, though a God-fearing man, was a dissenter, an arguer, a reasoner, and held that men were responsible for their actions. I think "judgment" will do very well; though it too is a polyvalent word: "O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts And men have lost their reason!" Shakespeare did not say "O conscience!" though it would have scanned.

English is a very difficult language.

To Serve Humanity

To return: I want to agree with Arnold Kettle again, and very strongly, when he says that "the only valid basis of judgment is whether any particular book or film or action will or will not serve humanity, not humanity in the abstract but human beings in the actual situation in which they find themselves". I have the strongest personal reasons for agreeing with this, and will take the liberty of stating them, for purposes of illustration.

In 1938 and 1939, when I had hardly got further than realising that I could no longer be a Tory, I had adopted the position of pacifism and non-violence. I thought that killing was a sin, not against God but against humanity. I could see that Germany was on the way to war, and I was proposing to join others of my opinion in non-violent resistance to invasion. The sin of killing I could not have upon my "conscience". But gradually it dawned on me, by the accumulation of reports from many sources, that the Nazis would not be in the slightest affected by such a demonstration

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of what was right, and would not have the slightest compunction in doing whatever they thought was necessary to get what they wanted. In other words, what I was proposing to do would be of no practical use to humanity, and indeed the lack of violent resistance might well mean the enslavement of humanity for an indefinite period. It became clear that I had to take upon my "conscience" the duty or responsibility to kill, in order that I might discharge my duties and responsibilities to mankind. The process was protracted—it took much longer than it takes to tell!—and painful; but it was a process of judgment, of deliberation, not a process of loss of "conscience".

I say the process was painful, but in the event my injury was trivial. No less painful, I am sure, was the process of judgment referred to in Frank Thompson's moving "Epitaph for my Friends"; but the injury they suffered was irreparable:

"So we, whose life was still before us,
Our hearts with sunlight filled,
Left in the hills our books and flowers,
Descended, and were killed.
Write on the stone no word of sadness—
Only the gladness due
That we, who asked the most of life,
Knew how to give it too."

There spoke an artist—a poet, in this case—who took a decision towards which he was impelled by his judgment, his social conscience, his inner censor; a decision which led to his death; a decision in which, we may well suppose, his hopes for all his fellows over-rode his natural longings for his own survival and continued artistic expression.

Many took that decision. Too many paid that price. Let not that choice be forced on us again. If it is to be prevented, humanity demands that the conscience of all men, artists and others, shall answer to something greater than themselves.

Laurie Green

AS the Secretary of a Party branch which has tried to combine political work with cultural activity I would like to comment on some of the ideas raised in Arnold Kettle's *The Artist and Politics*.

I realise that Comrade Kettle was not putting forward practical suggestions for narrowing the gap between the artists and the working class movement, but I feel that no discussion of this kind is of much value unless such suggestions are made.

In my own branch we set up a small committee to organise trips to Unity Theatre and to the Theatre Royal at Stratford. Not only this; when a lot of us felt that Unity's *Mother Courage* was very difficult to understand we asked for, and got, two of the actors to come to a meeting and tell us what they were trying to do.

We asked the *Daily Worker* art critic to take us round the Russian art exhibition, and he is coming to talk to us about *A Painter of Our Time*. We are having Dave Wallis, author of *Tramstop by the Nile*, to talk about literature.

We did these things because we felt that we only talked politics to each other; when we wanted to have a good discussion about a book or a film we generally had it with non-political, or at least non-Party people. But there is still a feeling that discussions on art are a luxury we can ill afford in the midst of class struggle.

There is, of course, an element of truth in this last idea. A branch that sells 100 *Daily Workers* a week is better than one which sells none but instead has a weekly discussion on "The Writer and Society". But I consider it the duty, not only of specialised cultural comrades, but of the leadership at all levels, to show that the branch which sells 100 will do even better if it shares and discusses cultural experience.

Arnold Kettle brings out an important idea, that the artist is seen in terms of "some almost mystical act of self-expression". We have to show people that by discussing art we are increasing the relevance of the artist to society, bringing the writer, the musician, the painter closer to those who are written about, painted and sung.

Naturally not every artist will want to listen to what his audience has to say. How fascinating it would be to hear what Salford Communists—or Salford people—think about *A Taste of Honey*. Can't we find out?

I think *Marxism Today* could do invaluable work in this connection by inviting creative artists to tell us what they think of the problem of the artist and politics, what they are trying to say and to whom they want to say it. And to hear what we think of them!

But it is no good telling them "that they are subject to the same obligations and duties as everyone else", as Arnold says. The artist has obligations and duties but they are different ones.

Above all, the critic and the intellectual should see it as their task to stimulate the creation of art, to suggest themes, to encourage conscious Socialists and Communists to find time to write and paint. It is said that the youthful Shelagh Delaney was taken to see a Rattigan play and said "I can write a better one than that".

I think this is the kind of attitude we must try to encourage. After all, shouldn't we in this discussion be proud of and emphasise the fact that of the three giants of the twentieth century—Shaw, O'Casey and Brecht—two were Communists and the other heart and soul with us against the hypocrisy of capitalism?

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These are some of the ways in which we can close the gap between the artist and his public. For too long this problem has been seen as insoluble until the artist moved towards us. Let's do all we can to move nearer to the artist.

Osmond Robb

ARNOLD KETTLE in his article in the current *Marxism Today* says this under the heading "Art is Important": "There is, however, a real danger that we may seriously underestimate the whole importance and supreme value of art. Art *is* one of the essential ways of discovering what men and their world are really like and, not least, what their potentialities are. Art is tremendously important and valuable precisely because it is not what culture-snobs think it is, a pleasant and elegant trimming to our lives, the icing on the cake." At the end of the article, under the heading "How Different is the Artist?" Comrade Kettle quotes approvingly Christopher Logue's dictum, "I think that we ought to to destroy the whole thing that the artist is different from anyone else" (what is meant, incidentally, by "thing"—an idea, held to be fictitious, or an actual state of affairs?) and goes on to say: "Of course, in one sense, an artist is different: he is an artist. But there are two kinds of different artists. One sees himself as having a special *sort* of sensibility, some special *sort* of direct contact with truth and reality, which makes him superior to, and in that sense different from, other people. This is the basis of snob art, 'élite' culture, intellectual arrogance. The second artist sees himself as different from other people only in the sense of being better able to express what all feel. This is the basis of a responsible and democratic attitude to art."

These two statements seem to me to illustrate an unresolved contradiction in the thinking of Comrade Kettle on this question. If art is "one of the essential ways of discovering what men and their world are really like", how is it enabled to throw such a bright and penetrating exploratory beam? If the artist is "different from other people only in the sense of being better able to express what all feel", how does it come about that he can show his fellow-men what they have not been able to see for themselves, what may shock and anger them to be made to see?

Take that savagely exuberant passage of anti-bourgeois satire that Comrade Kettle quotes from *Our Mutual Friend*. How many of Dickens's readers, one can't help wondering, had thought or felt this about "podsnapping", bourgeois philistinism, before Dickens made it so funny that they had to laugh at it, and then, perhaps, begin to ask themselves just what it was that they had been laughing at, whether it was perhaps a kind of insensitiveness, a kind of narrow "utilitarian" outlook on art that they had been infected with themselves?

Or take the famous example of Balzac, a Catholic "legitimist", as Engels pointed out, a representative of extreme reaction, whose *Comédie Humaine* exposed the evil of his own sort of people and his own conscious ideology? Does this not argue "a special *sort* of sensibility, some special *sort* of direct contact with truth and reality"? Marxist critics, writing about the problem of Balzac, have laid emphasis on the great novelist's "scientific approach". The link between a great artist and a great scientist which must be found if we are to understand this is undoubtedly "imagination", which Comrade Kettle defines as "the creative element involved in scientific research . . . the expression of man's power to project the experiences of the past into the future".

Now why should we be afraid of drawing the conclusion that there are different *sorts* of imaginative experience, different *kinds* of imaginative relationship with reality? The imaginative world of the mathematician is closed to me, and to many others; it is important, we couldn't get on in the modern world without it, but only the mathematically gifted have got real access to it. In that respect, if in no others, the mathematicians are not only "different" from, but "superior" to, the rest of us. So be it—mathematical thinking is not the only important and enjoyable mode of thinking, thank heavens! But why deny that the imaginative author who from childhood has paid far more attention than most people to his own thoughts and feelings, the emotional reality of his own relationships with other people and then of human relationships in general (grasped in the first place *intuitively* and rendered in precise, vivid, memorable, perhaps lovely words and phrases)—why deny that this literary artist has a means of coming to grips with reality that other people[1] lack or have never felt impelled to develop? In *this* respect—a very important respect, of course—he *is* "different" and also "superior". But he shouldn't get cock-a-hoop about it. Other people may be braver, may have more obviously practical abilities, may be far better at political theory and practice, economics, etc., may even be more appreciative and more creative in other art forms such as music or painting. But still in this one respect he *is* "different" and "superior"—and it is a very good, even a necessary thing for human society that he should be so. To say that he differs from other people only in "being better able to express what all feel" and that to take this view "is the basis of a responsible and democratic attitude

[1] Certain other kinds of people can be imaginative and intuitive in this kind of way—one thinks of the more imaginative sort of psychologist or philosopher—but they will not have gone so far on this particular path.

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to art" is to assert a kind of egalitarianism which is actually dangerous to the proper functioning of an adult and humanly diverse, a variously *exploratory* democracy—such as a socialist democracy must be.

Now if this "difference" of the artist (I have confined myself to considering writers, but what I have said applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to other artists) is granted, it follows that the demand for the freedom of the artist is not essentially different from the demand for the freedom of the scientific thinker. Any kind of fundamental thought *must* be free, or it cannot be fundamental.

Comrade Kettle argues that the objection to "the inner censor" (obviously in the context of Doris Lessing's statement "the inner censor" is "ideological", a projection into the mind of the writer of "the Party") amounts to the demand that the writer "should *always* say what first comes into his head or that he should always say what he has a particularly strong impulse to say, *regardless of the consequences*". Now no serious writer, devoted to his art and craft, is going to put down "what first comes into his head", and if he has "a particularly strong impulse" to say something in an artistic form, it will be in the context of his entire development as a writer and a human being—and, if he is a Communist, as a Communist—that he will feel this impulse; that is to say, it will *not* be "regardless of the consequences", but his view of the relevant or the most important consequences may well differ from that of the non-writers with whom, otherwise, he is in general agreement.

We cannot do much with Comrade Kettle's imaginary example of a novel about Notting Hill "in which most of the West Indian and African characters turned out to be knife-carriers, drug-pedlars and ponces". Such a novel, if it were written in a hurry to cash in on the racist outrages, would almost certainly be aesthetically worthless as well as socially and politically deplorable. It is conceivable however that a novel which could be briefly described in the terms that Comrade Kettle uses here, might have a genuine if limited validity, might be a work of art. In that case it would not be so easy to assess its most likely effect on those who would read it. It might be more effective, even from the point of view of combating racialism, than a badly written, an obviously shallow and propagandist novel in which most of the West Indian and African characters turned out to be honest, upright working men and women.

Take a novel by Ernest Hemingway which was once the subject of a good deal of angry criticism by Communists and others who felt that it was an insult to the Spanish Republican cause—*For Whom the Bell Tolls*. One of the criticisms made of this book was that in describing in detail the increasingly brutal "liquidation" of a group of fascist and pro-fascist local notables, Hemingway seemed to be saying that there was little to choose between the two sides. Actually, however, he makes it clear that one of the chief objections to the sadistic "fun" which he describes is that it tends to degrade a noble cause and a necessary act. The magnificent gipsy woman, Pilar, one of Hemingway's finest characters, is revolted as the slaughter goes on, and plays no further part in it. On the other hand, the raping of Maria by the fascists, which fills Robert Jordan with the feeling of hatred when she tells him of it, has no good or necessary side to it at all; it is just what is to be expected of fascists.

The passages in the novel which describe André Marty as an old man gone crazy with hatred and suspicion, a danger to his own side, were perhaps the most deeply disturbing for Communist readers. Well, Marty later broke with the Party, as we know. Whether he was really like this in Spain, I have no means of knowing (although I trust Hemingway sufficiently to believe that he didn't just make it up). But I do know this—that already in 1939 Ernest Hemingway was describing in his imaginative writing that atmosphere of insane "witch-hunting" which emanated from Stalin and Beria and which infected the world Communist movement. He sensed it, and he was doing his duty as a writer, no matter what any political leadership might say, by setting it down. Shallow and thoughtless people might be encouraged by reading such passages to say "a plague on both your houses" as they considered the world-wide struggle between democracy and fascism. But those who could respond fully to what Hemingway wrote would not be deflected from their anti-fascism, any more than he himself was.

Marx once thundered: "Ignorance never did anybody any good!" If we really believe this, we must cherish the freedom of the artist to tell us what we don't already know and what we may resent being told, and even try to disparage and ridicule. If art is to be more than "a pleasant and elegant trimming to our lives, the icing on the cake", it *must* be free—not free from criticism of course, not deemed to be infallible—but free to follow its own laws of development and to gain access to our hearts and minds.

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On the development of nations in South Africa[1]

J. Adams

LIONEL FORMAN affirms that there is no nation in South Africa. But there were nations once; two, in fact, for the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State conformed to his definition of a nation in every respect. Did the Afrikaans lose their national identity when they were conquered? If one respects his rejection of the term "nationality"—a term used by Marxists for half a century—should one refer to the Afrikaans as a "post-nation"?

His error has been to interpret the concept "common territory" as meaning "a territory on one's own". In fact, there are nations where several cultural, linguistic groupings share a territory; for example, Switzerland and the Soviet Union. It is no good quoting Stalin on the Jews in Russia to prove the need for a majority in one area before a nationality comes into being. One can counterpose Lenin in "Critical Remarks on the National Question", who speaks of ". . . the most oppressed and persecuted nation, the Jewish". Better than a battle of quotations is to look at the facts. In pre-revolutionary Russia the Jews were oppressed. In present-day South Africa the Afrikaans operate the machinery of oppression. Afrikaans culture is fostered by the state, Afrikaans religion flourishes, Afrikaans is an official language.

It is quite true that English is also an official language, and that the element with an English background enjoy the same privileges. But then there are other nations with more than one language; India, for instance. Economic intercourse in a capitalist state requires a language used in common by its inhabitants. Although neither English nor Afrikaans is the language of the majority, this requirement is met by the legal enforcement of their use in South Africa. Quite clearly a nation exists in South Africa—not Afrikaans nor English—but South African, composed of people who use Afrikaans and English languages and cultures.

What of the other racial groupings in South Africa—African, Indian and Coloured? Forman envisages a separate nation, each flowering and prospering, for each separate grouping that differs in language, territory, economy or culture. The Apartheid advocated by the Nationalists proposes a division into three, but there would be Zulu, Basuto, Xosa, Swazi, Tswana, Barotse, Baralong, Pondo African nations *ad infinitum*, plus Tamil and Gujarati nations divided into Hindu and Moslem states and so on, if his line of thought is pursued to its conclusion.

He has overlooked the assimilating force which capitalism provides. To quote Lenin who puts it pithily:

"The wide and rapid development of productive forces by capitalism demands large, politically compact and united territories in which alone—breaking down all the old medieval, caste, parochial, small national, religious and other barriers—the bourgeois class—and its inevitable antipode, the proletarian class—can unite . . . as long and in so far as different nations constitute an integral state Marxists will not under any circumstances advocate either the federal principle or decentralisation. The centralised big state marks a tremendous historical step forward from medieval disintegration towards the future socialist unity of the whole world and except through such a state (inseparably connected with capitalism) there is no road to socialism nor can be" (Lenin: "Critical Remarks on the National Question").

This does not overlook the possibility of separate national states arising in South Africa in view of a democratic respect for the rights of nations to self-determination. In view of the fact, however, that no democrat in that part of the world will have any say for some time, the probability is otherwise. There is so little doubt that the dominant mode of production in South Africa is capitalism—a modern, dynamic, expanding capitalism—that one need not pause to prove the point. It is this which makes the South African situation unique in Africa. This capitalism has unleashed tremendous economic forces which are assimilating all the different peoples of South Africa into a single nation. For example, an economic factor, more important than national composition, is the growth of towns, distinguished for their mixed populations, which cannot be divided up to fit separate territories for the sake of the national factor. The United States of America is an example of such a nation where this assimilation has been completed. There it does not matter what language, religion or culture, workers or bosses—be they Negroes, Anglo-Saxons, Russians, Jews or Italians—use in private life, all are equally American. Similarly, if the process has

[1] See *Marxism Today*, April 1959

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not been completed already, Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Europeans are being fast assimilated into a South African nation which is already in existence. The process is being accelerated precisely because the full cultural and linguistic expression of some sections is being impeded in South Africa. Those disintegrating tribal communities which have not yet attained separate national consciousness will only do so as South Africans.

It is not surprising that there is little demand for secession and self-determination—indeed, the label "National Liberation Movement" is a complete misnomer—for in a single national state the demand is for equal democratic rights. This does not spring from the fact that there are no nations in South Africa, but that the arising South African nation is oppressed by a reactionary government. The ideology which animates the Nationalist Party is an example of the contradiction between political superstructure and economic basis in a changing capitalist state. It corresponds to an earlier phase of capitalist development in South Africa, a semi-colonial phase based largely on the formation of absolute surplus value extracted from the exploitation of primary resources. Although this continues, the basis has changed to modern industrial capitalism based largely on the formation of relative surplus value. The bourgeois superstructure will one day conform better to this economic basis, provided the more fundamental clash between capitalism and socialism is not resolved meanwhile, despite the attempts of the Apartheid doctrinaires. Comrade Forman need not align himself with them by identifying himself with the specific national aspirations of each nationality. He should do no more than respect such feelings.

No wonder then that when Forman looks at the Afrikaans and sees only policemen, at the English and sees only supervisors, at Africans and sees only workers, he can complain that each section fails to qualify as a nation. He is looking at components of a single arising nation where class divisions for good historical reasons happen to correspond to some extent with racial differences. He does not see classes only colours, hence misinterpreting the evidence of the single national market he cannot pass over in silence.

Reply to the discussion

On the Jewish problem

Bert Ramelson

WITH the exception of Comrade Rosenberg (*Marxism Today*, March 1959), there has been no disagreement with those sections of my article dealing with all aspects of the problem other than the nature and prospects of Yiddish culture. Of this last section Comrade Waterman is sharply critical.

What about Comrade Rosenberg's criticism?

His main contentions (apart from setting up Aunt Sallies and "destroying" arguments I never used, as Solly Kaye so clearly pointed out in his contribution in the April issue) are:

i. That since an Israeli nation is rapidly emerging as "Ramelson himself states", then it must follow that the nature of the Jewish problem is national in character and we must therefore have a policy in line with this "new Jewish consciousness".
ii. That whereas anti-Semitism was the core of the problem before the war, it is no longer so.

Are these arguments tenable? Firstly, millions of people from scores of different countries, due to intolerance at home, left their native lands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the U.S.A. In the course of time a new nation—the American nation—was formed out of a variety of peoples of different national origin. What is happening in Israel is not very different from what happened earlier in the United States. Surely, it wouldn't occur to anyone to argue that the emergence of an American nation was somehow the result of a common *national* problem affecting the immigrants who formed the core of this new nation. Why then should Comrade Rosenberg assume that the emergence of a new nation—the Israeli nation—must be proof that a common *national* problem affected the immigrants to Israel?

Nor do we get anywhere by the use of such phrases as "Jewish consciousness". Surely no Marxist should adopt the idealist subjective criterion in evaluating the existence or otherwise of nationality. Bebel, long ago, warned against this subjective approach to the national question. Objective material circumstances, and not abstract factors such as "consciousness", determine nationality.

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What about the second criticism? It seems to me that Comrade Rosenberg, in stating that anti-Semitism is no longer the major problem, is something like the Reformists, who in a period of capitalist boom theorise that unemployment and economic crisis are no longer the key problems for the working class. It is their failure to understand the nature of capitalism that leads them to see a temporary period of capitalist stability as proof of the permanent solution of the problem—and by doing so, they create harmful illusions and divert the struggle. Similarly, only those who fail to understand that class society is the basic cause of anti-Semitism can argue, as Comrade Rosenberg does, that anti-Semitism has ceased to be the central problem, while the majority of Jews still live in those two-thirds of the world in which class society continues to exist. So long as a class-divided society exists, just so long will anti-Semitism remain the main problem affecting Jews. Its intensity will vary from time to time and place to place, dependent on a whole number of factors. But it is there all the time, and remains a potential danger to the very existence of the Jews.

I am extremely sorry that Comrade Waterman, in expressing his sharp disagreement with my views on the nature and future (or rather no future) of Yiddish as a language or medium for the further development of a specific culture, found it necessary to distort what I said.

There was no need at all, for example, to cast doubt on my attitude to the "administrative measures taken in 1948" as he does in writing "I can only *assume* . . . he means the unjust and illegal acts. . . ." I made my meaning perfectly clear when I wrote: "In 1948, *during the period of abuse of Soviet democracy and legality*, administrative measures were taken. . . ." (January 1959, p. 26). Or another example. In my article I listed a series of facts as a basis for discussion. One of those listed facts was that the justification *given* for closing down Yiddish institutions was lack of demand. The statement of this unchallenged fact is distorted by Comrade Waterman into an implication that *I* said that there was no demand, or that *in my opinion*, such lack of demand is sufficient justification for such actions. Having ascribed to me what I never said or implied, it is then easy, of course, for him to "quote" me against myself.

Now I want to say a few words about Comrade Waterman's general position. The tragedy for him is the conflict within himself, so patently demonstrated in his contribution. The conflict, which affects also other comrades, is one between objective Marxist understanding and emotional subjective love for the mother tongue. Thus on page 123 (April) he argues: "Let me say clearly and unequivocally that there can be no doubt that the process of integration is taking place . . . particularly the younger generation neither speak nor understand Yiddish . . . no Socialist should oppose such a natural process". Thus speaks Comrade Waterman, the Marxist, and in this one sentence, whether he realises it or not, he accepts the essence of my argument. But no sooner does he utter this, than Comrade Waterman, the emotional Yiddish enthusiast, emerges to contradict him, and produces arguments hardly worthy of him.

Similarly, Comrade Waterman, the Marxist, staunchly declares on page 125 (April): "No Marxist would claim that the Jews in the Soviet Union were at any time a nation." But Comrade Waterman, the Yiddish enthusiast, ignoring his other self, declares equally staunchly on page 123 (April) that after 1917, Yiddish culture became "*national* in form and Socialist in content".

Comrade Waterman, the Marxist, is on much firmer ground, and when he forgets his Marxism, he becomes confused and is compelled to fall back on very naive arguments indeed!

He quotes a number of Yiddish publications still being published in a number of countries; but having deserted his Marxist objectivity for the moment, he fails to inform us that they are only a fraction of the number that were published a decade ago, or that not a single Yiddish daily is published in Britain. I am glad that Comrades Zaidman and Falber filled in his omissions.

The fact that 3 million people attended Jewish concerts in the U.S.S.R. is proof that concerts are being performed there (thus showing rectification of the wrong measures of 1948), but it is no proof at all of a revival and development of Yiddish culture. No more so than the packed audiences to which the Moscow Art Theatre played in London is proof of the emergence of Russian culture in Britain.

The danger of allowing oneself to succumb to subjectivism is shown by Comrade Waterman's attack on me for saying: "Segregation in the ghettoes . . . created a specific culture depicting ghetto life".

It is no accident that all the works of the great names in Yiddish literature—Mendele Mocher Seforim, Perez, Sholem Aleichem—depicted ghetto life and the people's revolt against its misery, poverty and intolerance. It is equally not accidental that Sholem Asch, the last in that tradition, once removed from the ghetto, was compelled to go back 2,000 years in search of subject matter for his later novels in the last decade of his life, e.g. *The Nazarene*. However, there is no need for me to develop this further, as Comrades Gallacher and Zaidman (May and June issues) have done so.

Comrade Waterman writes: "To quote the President of the Zionist Organisation in support

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of his theory is the measure of the bankruptcy of evidence available to Comrade Ramelson", page 124 (April). In the first place Nahum Goldman, whom I quoted, was speaking in his capacity of President of the World Jewish Congress, an organisation including Zionists, non-Zionists and anti-Zionists. Secondly, the quotation I used was to back up not only my views but also those held by Comrade Waterman himself as expressed by him on page 123 quoted earlier. Surely evidence supporting one's point of view given by a hostile witness is the strongest possible and most desirable evidence to submit.

Comrade Waterman himself quotes from Kalinin on page 123 (April): "On March 28th, 1928, a Government decree set aside Biro-Bijan as a Jewish Autonomous Region, with the view to an eventual formation of a Jewish Socialist Republic, in order that it might 'preserve a Yiddish Socialist national culture' (Kalinin)." Comrade Kalinin was absolutely right. To preserve a Yiddish national culture, it was essential for the Jews to develop and become a nation. The Soviet Union set aside Biro-Bijan to provide the opportunity for just this. But, unfortunately for Comrade Waterman, the Jews in the Soviet Union voted with their feet against this project. They chose integration instead, with the inevitable consequences foreseen by Kalinin—the decay of Yiddish culture.

I agree with Comrade Waterman's closing sentence: "Let us counter the pernicious Zionist and reactionary propaganda by reaffirming our belief in Socialism, and let us make it once again 'the dominant trend among Jewish workers and many of the middle class'." I don't think this can be achieved, however, by indulging in wishful thinking or sentimental hankering after a past which has disappeared forever. Only by facing life as it is and by combating wrong views, no matter how honestly they are held, can this aim be realised.

Published by the Communist Party, 16 King Street, London, W.C.2, and printed by Farleigh Press Ltd. (T.U. all depts.) Beechwood Rise, Watford, Herts.

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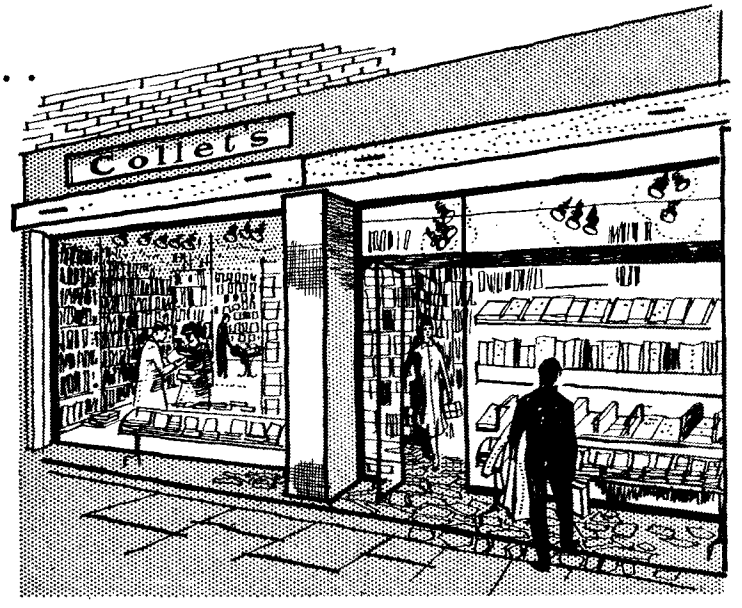

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